Commentary
November 1996

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Joseph P. Viteritti

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John Gross

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Books in Review
Leslie Lenkowsky • Raymond P. Scheindlin • Daniel J. Silver
David Brooks • Wilfred M. McClay

PUBLISHED BY THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE • $3.75/$4.50 CANADA • VOLUME 102 • NUMBER 5

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Commentary®

Vol. 102 · November 1996 · No. 5

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COMMENTARY (ISSN 0010-2601) is published monthly by the American Jewish Committee—EDITORIAL AND BUSINESS OFFICES: 165 East 56th Street, New York, NY 10022 Telephone: (212) 751-4000. Fax: (212) 751-1174. E-MAIL: 103115.2375@compuserve.com. Unsolicited manuscripts must be accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Single copy is $3.75; $39 a year, 2 years $72, 3 years $105—Add $8.00 per year for all foreign subscriptions, including Canada and Latin America. For subscription information call: (800) 829-6270—Second-class postage paid at New York, NY and at additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to COMMENTARY, 165 East 56th Street, New York, NY 10022.

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COMMENTARY is a member of The Leadership Network. (212) 725-2106; Fax (212) 779-1928.

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Commentary
November 1996

Letters from Readers

The Beliefs of American Jews

To the Editor:

Commentary deserves high praise for the symposium, "What Do American Jews Believe?" [August] It is both an anthology of stimulating, sometimes stirring statements of personal religious credos and an exposition, in lucid terms, of the most critical points in the debate over whether American Jews constitute one people, or two, or more, and whether unity is something they can, or should, seek. The nonpartisan format demands close attention and encourages reasoned evaluation rather than emotional reaction. For this alone, I am grateful. . . .

When I completed my reading, I was struck by an alarming contradiction I sensed in the body of responses. . . . On the one hand, many contributors evinced humble appreciation of the limitations of human reason in confronting the divine; on the other hand, some alluded—with less subtlety and more unbecoming assurance than they may possess—to errors and evil intentions they recognized or expected in the beliefs of equally sincere adversaries. Perhaps the science-fiction writer Robert Heinlein was correct in his crack that "One man's theology is another man's belly laugh." Indeed, an injection of a bit more humor into the exercise, particularly of the self-deprecating kind, might have a salutary effect on our tumultuous religious climate. When so few Jewish leaders, those with ambitions to guide the thinking of others (sometimes with binding authority), can summon up even minimal respect for the conscience-searching of others, is it any wonder that so few ordinary Jews choose to listen to their message?

I would be curious to read an analogous symposium on what Israeli Jews believe. I suspect the exercise would reveal more vividly, and perhaps surprisingly to both Israelis and Americans, the varieties of belief as well as the profundity of the schisms in the Jewish community.

Elsa Solender
New York City

To the Editor:

. . . Most American Jews do not believe in the God described by the strongly "traditionalist" contributors to the symposium or even in the ethical or mystical approaches of other contributors. Not only do they not believe in the traditional God, they do not preserve, in their public or private lives, the traditional practices that have been the glue that holds the Jewish people together.

The evidence we have indicates that there is greater coherence between the beliefs of Orthodox leaders and their followers than exists in other denominations of Judaism. Thus the most effective way that Judaism has found to retain its hold over its followers in the context of the openness of American culture has been to create institutions which isolate children until they are immunized. Most American Jews have chosen not to follow that path, with the consequence that, as the opening statement recognizes, "ever larger number of Jews appear to be responding by assimilating, marrying out, or otherwise falling away."

The real issue, which was not addressed by the symposium, is how to convince nonbelieving, nonaffiliated, and even affiliated liberal adult Jews that remaining Jewish (in any of its forms) is worthwhile. . . .

Eugene Sucov
Jerusalem, Israel

To the Editor:

The all-important seventh question, the one the symposium did not ask, is this: "Is any member of your family—child, grandchild, nephew, niece, cous-

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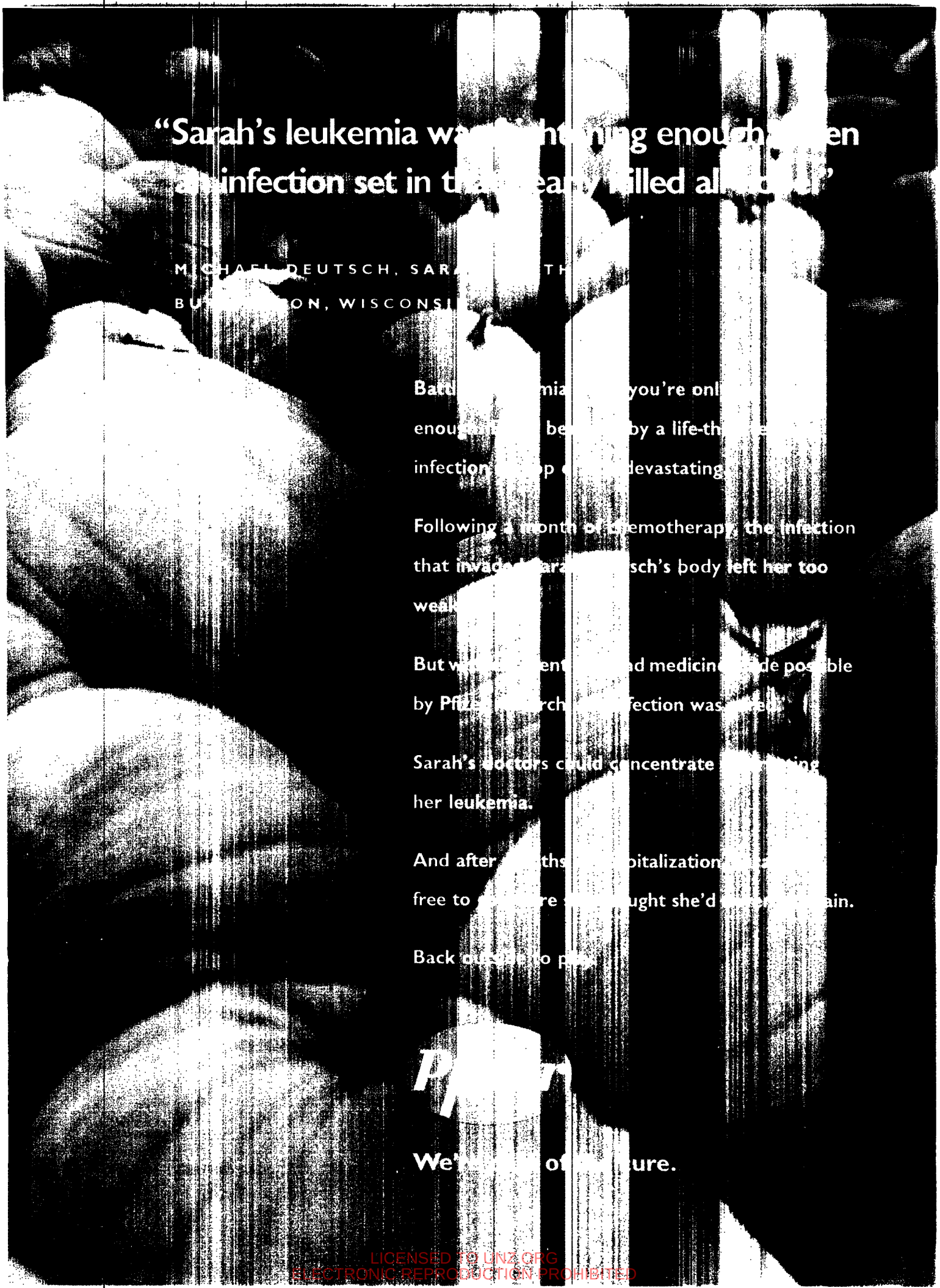

"Sarah's leukemia wa[illegible]ng enou[illegible]en a infection set in t[illegible]ea[illegible]illed al[illegible]"

M[illegible]CHAEL DEUTSCH, SARA[illegible]TH
BU[illegible]ON, WISCONSI[illegible]

Ba[illegible]mia [illegible]you're onl[illegible]
enou[illegible] be[illegible]by a life-th[illegible]
infection[illegible]p [illegible]devastating[illegible]

Following a month of [illegible]emotherapy, the infection that invade[illegible]ara[illegible]sch's body left her too weak[illegible]

But w[illegible]ent[illegible]d medicin[illegible]de pos[illegible]ble by Pfi[illegible]rch[illegible]fection was[illegible]

Sarah's doctors could concentrate [illegible]ing her leukemia.

And after [illegible]ths [illegible]pitalization[illegible] free to [illegible]re [illegible]ught she'd [illegible]ain.

Back [illegible]o p[illegible]

We'[illegible] of [illegible]ure.

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in—intermarried?" And none of the respondents mentioned it. If in fact they are all personally untouched by intermarriage, their dutiful answers to the first six questions are irrelevant to ordinary Jews. We are the ones living through the collapse of the 50's "model Jewish family" which the symposium contributors seem to take as a given. We are the ones struggling to reconstruct the Jewish family in the face of these realities.

If some of the respondents have been personally affected by these precedent-shattering events, they should be ashamed to hide behind the politically-correct, rehashed pieties which the questions encouraged. . . .

ANNETTE B. WEINSHANK
East Lansing, Michigan

TO THE EDITOR:

How odd that the selection of contributors was limited to those who are professionally or ideologically committed—of course they believe in God, etc.—and that it left out the sentiments of atheists, agnostics, . . . or those who constitute that broad spectrum of American Jews who belong to synagogues more out of societal pressure than religious calling. And where were the sentiments of that even broader spectrum who, while accepting of *Yiddishkeit*, neither practice Judaism as a religion nor encourage their children to become observers? Indeed, many enlightened Jews look upon this planet's religious history as anathema. . . .

AARON JACOBSON
Cleveland, Ohio

TO THE EDITOR:

"What Do American Jews Believe?" was insightful and stimulating, particularly because of the cross-disciplinary and cross-denominational backgrounds of the contributors. What was lacking, however, was a cross-generational axis. I am only guessing, but based upon the short identifications at the end of each essay, I would venture that the average age of the participants was between fifty-five and sixty, if not higher. Thus, answers to the questions on the Holocaust and Israel were addressed by writers who had had immediate experience of the European tragedy, the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, and the recapture of Jerusalem in 1967. Such thinkers have only limited insight into what twenty- and thirty-something American Jews believe, as well as how to achieve an American Jewish revival which would appeal to this younger generation.

My American Jewish contemporaries (in general) are more removed from the Holocaust and racial anti-Semitism and do not recall a world without a state of Israel or a unified Jerusalem under Jewish auspices. We also do not recall an American Jewish community in which clearly defined denominational structures and institutions were not already in place. . . . Thus, it appears to me that the symposium would have greatly benefited from voices of my generation who are now making their way into Jewish communal life. . . .

NATHAN J. DIAMENT
Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America
New York City

TO THE EDITOR:

. . . I spend a good deal of my time as opinion editor of the campus paper at Stanford trying to get students to talk about religious and ethical questions; thus my excitement when the August issue of COMMENTARY came out. Unfortunately, as the symposium once again proved, it appears that only those who are already believers care to speak out forcefully on these issues. As an undergraduate philosophy student, I was disappointed in the lack of rational analysis applied by the symposium respondents to the question of God's existence. It is really a pity that the participants, otherwise so insightful and reasonable, chose to offer only the crudest of philosophical justifications for their belief in God. . . .

I may be accused of being a Hellenized Jew, enthralled by the seductions of Greek logic. Fine, I accept that. I am an unabashed modernist; I look to reasoned argument and tried-and-true empirical evidence as sources for belief. I have yet to be convinced that either provides a very plausible case for the existence of God.

If Jewish religious leaders really want to attract contemplative Jewish Americans into their synagogues, I suggest that they stop giving us justification-by-faith-alone answers when very legitimate questions are asked about the core of the Jewish religion.

DAVID WOLITZ
Stanford, California

TO THE EDITOR:

Several contributors note the extraordinary impact feminism has had on Jewish life. Yet, sadly, the symposium fails to reflect that impact in its selection of participants. Such a failure is in itself a commentary, and should not go unnoticed.

In their introduction to the symposium the editors note a *slight* statistical bias in favor of Orthodox or otherwise traditionalist sentiment. If by "traditionalist sentiment" they also mean what Blu Greenberg refers to as the "hierarchy and injustice in a highly ethical religion" that has led to the exclusion of women from such forums, then far more than a slight statistical bias prevails.

Only seven out of 47 participants (15 percent) are women. To be sure, this reflects some progress over the 1966 COMMENTARY symposium, "The State of Jewish Belief," which had no women participants. But it is hardly adequate, given the monumental changes for Jewish women, in the religious and academic spheres in particular, over the last three decades. The paucity of women's voices, of prominent women rabbis, thinkers, and organizational leaders in the symposium is more than regrettable—it is unacceptable. . . .

GAIL T. REIMER
Director, the Jewish Women's Archive

MICHAEL RUKIN
Chair of the Board, Combined Jewish Philanthropies
Chair of the Board, Hillel
Brookline, Massachusetts

TO THE EDITOR:

Congratulations on an excellent symposium. Like many of your readers, I am thankful to COMMENTARY for the opportunity to broaden my understanding of how American Jewish beliefs among the intellectual elite have changed over the past 30 years. I find it a continual source of stimulation to compare and contrast the answers to the questions expressed in the current sym-

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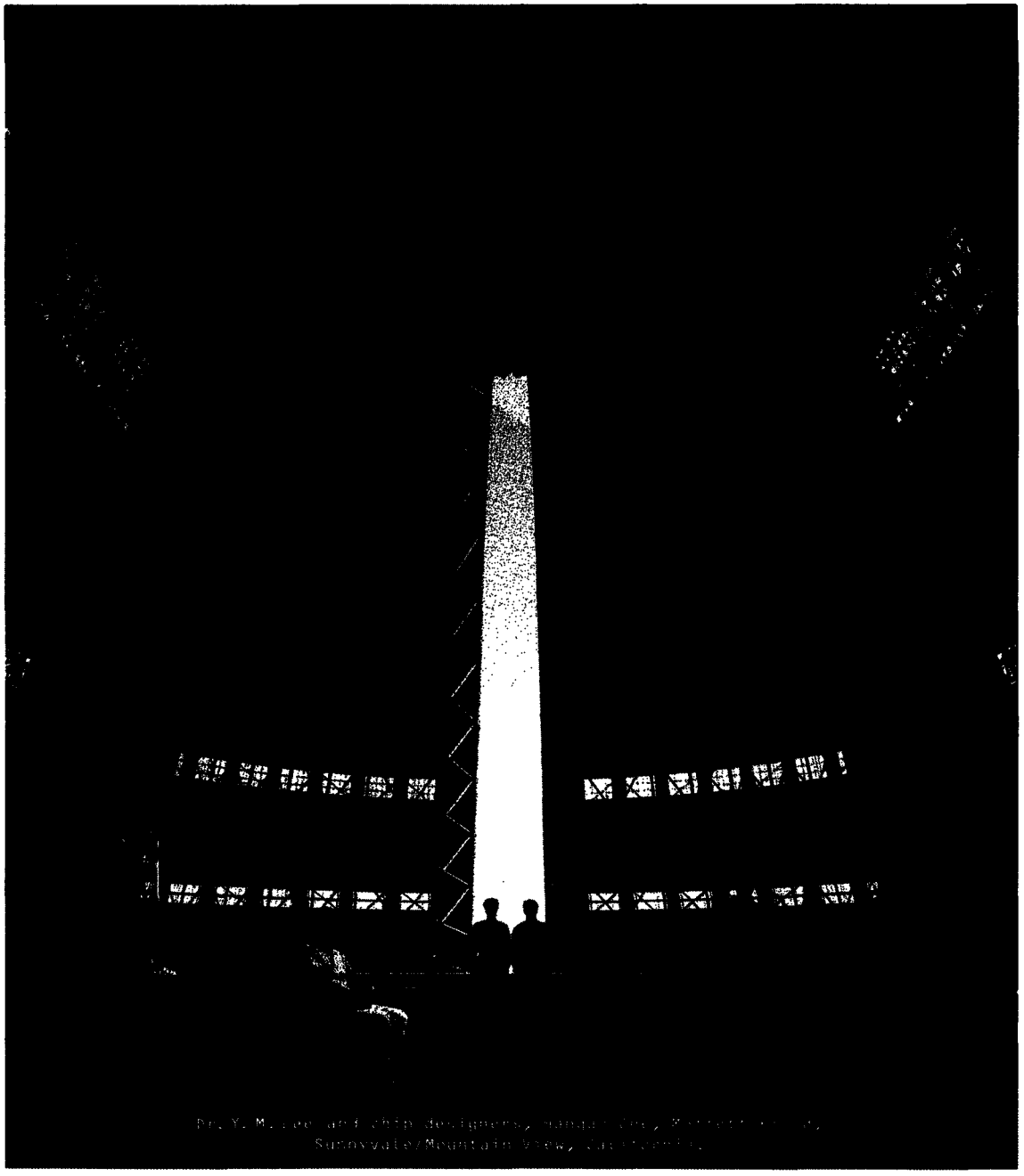

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posium with those expressed in the earlier one in 1966. . . .

It was surprising, however, and disheartening, to see only one prominent individual (Devora Steinmetz) included from the field of Jewish education. Among the symposium's "engaged minority," the halls of academia were well represented, and so too was the pulpit rabbinate. But where were the leaders (or the seminary and university professors who teach and guide prospective leaders) of Jewish schools, summer camps, and youth and adult-education programs, . . . who are most involved in the everyday life of affiliated American Jews?

Unlike university professors, professional Jewish educators interact not just with adults but with various age groups; and unlike pulpit rabbis, Jewish educational leaders see their students (and families) not just during holidays and life-cycle events. . . . Including their perspective, therefore, could have been a worthwhile addition to an already enlightening work.

ELLIOT FEIN
Director of Education
Congregation Eilat
Mission Viejo, California

TO THE EDITOR:

We object to the characterization by David Klinghoffer, in his otherwise thoughtful essay, of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) as a "scare-mongering group." ADL has been combating anti-Semitism and racism, and fighting for the civil rights of all people for over 83 years in a responsible manner.

In carrying out our mission to "stop the defamation of the Jewish people, and secure justice and fair treatment to all citizens alike," it is essential to keep track of and respond to incidents of anti-Semitism when they occur, and to promote programs that reduce or prevent anti-Semitism and bigotry of all kinds. We provide support and assistance to law-enforcement agencies in combating and responding to hate crimes, and the *ADL Audit of Anti-Semitic Incidents* has been used as a model by other organizations for their own bias-incident reporting. . . .

We are aware of the seriousness of alleging anti-Semitism; our reputation as one of the nation's premier civil-rights organizations is based on our credibility, reliability, and refusal to "cry wolf." In many cases, our investigations reveal that in fact there is no cause for alarm, and we are diligent about reporting these findings. In fact, the most recent *ADL Audit* indicated a *decline* in incidents reported to the League. Is this scare-mongering?

ABRAHAM H. FOXMAN
National Director
Anti-Defamation League
New York City

TO THE EDITOR:

Congratulations on the "belief" symposium, which I read from cover to cover. Permit me to make the following observations on David Klinghoffer's contribution.

Of all the beliefs Mr. Klinghoffer expressed, none seems stronger than the idea that his own reductionist thoughts on revelation and the Oral Law are the only ones any committed Jew could conceivably hold. It might surprise him to know that A.J. Heschel, presumably no lesser an authority on Jewish thought than Mr. Klinghoffer, required three volumes to recount the intellectual history of the varied views expressed on these concepts in classical Jewish texts (unfortunately, Heschel's work has not been translated into English).

The notion that simplistic soundbites can replace an understanding of Jewish history only serves to reinforce ignorance. As Mr. Klinghoffer points out, fearing God is only the first step toward wisdom. The achievement of wisdom is dependent on other steps, not the least of which is knowledge of our history.

YEHUDAH COHN
New York City

TO THE EDITOR:

COMMENTARY is to be commended for presenting an unusual, thought-inspiring collection of diverse reflections and viewpoints on what American Jews believe; it will warrant mulling-over for a long time to come. Here, I would like to make a few comments on the contribution of Rabbi Joshua O. Haberman. . . .

Rabbi Haberman is certainly right that the Holocaust "raises questions about Germans, Jews, and God which we may never be able to answer." The ultimate question of "why" will, I am afraid, forever elude us. His puzzlement, however, is based on the ahistorical assumption that a high level of civilization is somehow incompatible with depravity. When in human history have technological and scientific advancements *not* been used . . . for more efficient killing?

A second ahistorical assumption made by Rabbi Haberman is more serious since it involves yet another instance of blaming the victims. Whereas he finds incomprehensible the "suddenness" with which Germans, Austrians, and other Gentiles succumbed to the evil of Nazism, the Jews receive no such benefit of doubt.

With 20/20 hindsight, Rabbi Haberman points an accusing finger . . . at "five generations" of Jews for belittling or disregarding "the countless warning signs of the approaching catastrophe." I presume he is referring to the Jews in the German-speaking lands, not to the millions of East European Jews who made up the bulk of the murdered. . . .

Yes, there was anti-Semitism in Germany and Austria, as elsewhere. . . . Yes, the image of the Jew as despicable, parasitic outsider, the stranger, not part of the organic body of the *Volk*, was deeply ingrained in the culture and the psyche of Germans of all classes. . . . But at no time in the 100 years between 1815 and 1918 was there endemic violence, official or otherwise, against German Jews. There were no pogroms, no lynch mobs. Jews could ply their trade and go to their places of worship without fear of being attacked by gangs. The physical threat was absent until the Weimar Republic, . . . yet even then, and even after 1933, nobody in his wildest dreams could foresee what was to come. . . .

Unfortunately, the ahistorical approach . . . is again coming into vogue and receiving currency. If this were the only meaning one could find in the death of the millions, they would truly have died in vain.

BRIGITTE M. GOLDSTEIN
Highland Park, New Jersey

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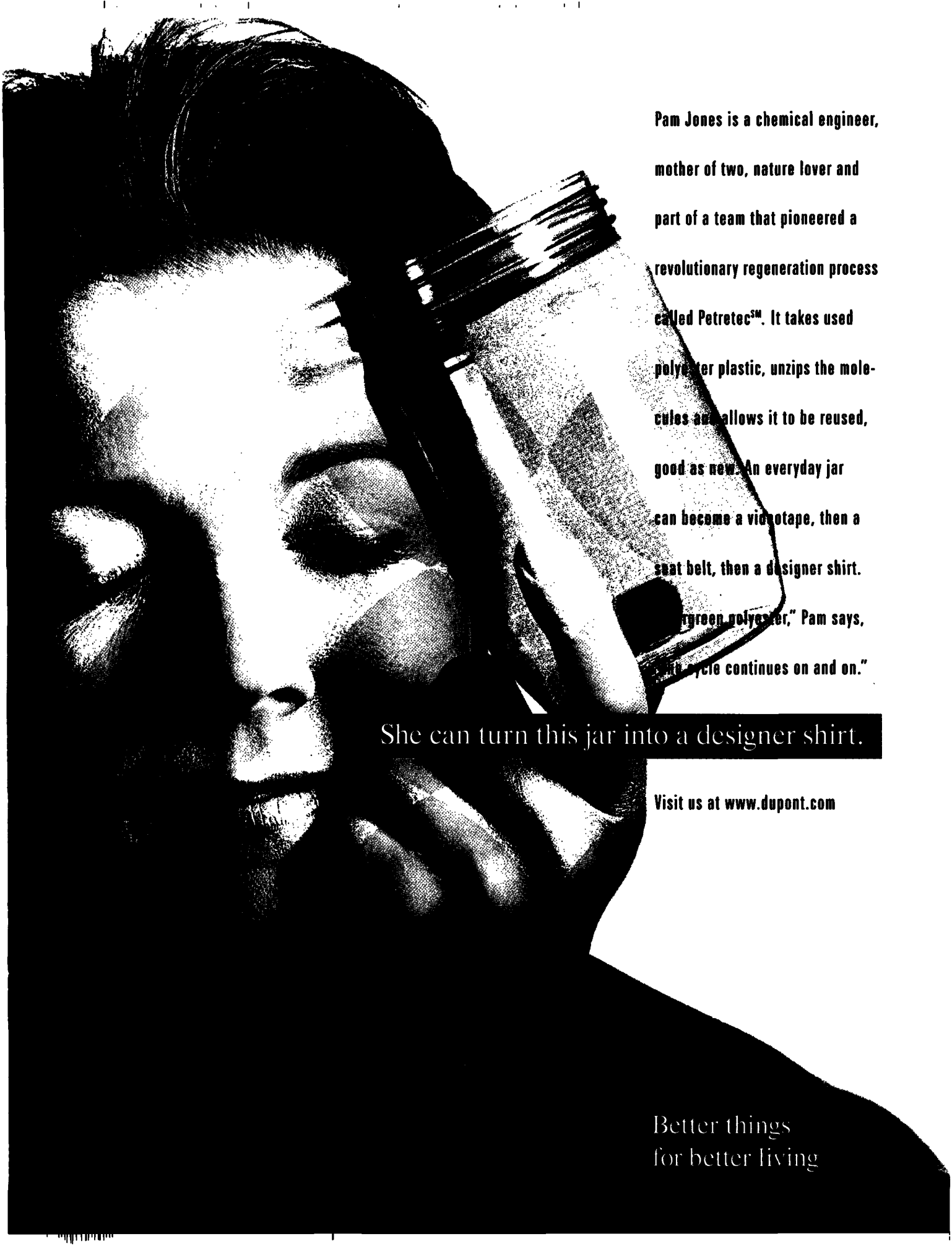

Pam Jones is a chemical engineer, mother of two, nature lover and part of a team that pioneered a revolutionary regeneration process called Petretec℠. It takes used polyester plastic, unzips the molecules and allows it to be reused, good as new. An everyday jar can become a videotape, then a seat belt, then a designer shirt. "Evergreen polyester," Pam says, "the cycle continues on and on."

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TO THE EDITOR:

Rabbi Marc Gellman worries that

> we are teaching the Holocaust in a manner that reinforces the inevitability of Christian anti-Semitism and therefore prevents a new generation of Jews from ever trusting in the sincerity of Christian repentance.

But . . . this is to put the cart before the horse, or rather it is to blame the victim.

Ignoring the role of Christianity and the substructure as well as the superstructure it provided for anti-Judaism from the time it became the recognized religion of most of Europe, that is, for almost 2,000 years prior to the Holocaust, would be doing a gross injustice to the facts. . . .

Christianity has in many ways modified its position vis-à-vis Judaism. It has, for example, eliminated some rancorous language from its liturgy and it has set up a dialogue with some Jewish religious leaders. But the relationship is still not a smooth one. The largest denomination of Protestants in the U.S., the Southern Baptists, recently voted overwhelmingly to make an overt effort to convert Jews. How does such a rebuff to our faith resemble repentance, and how should a younger generation of Jews view this resolve?

JUDITH HIRSCH
Boca Raton, Florida

TO THE EDITOR:

. . . Nearly all the responses to the symposium contained rationalizations attempting to explain the writers' failure or refusal to live in Israel.

Almost all the respondents seem to feel uplifted by the fact of Israel's existence; they freely admit to being sublimely influenced in their Jewishness by the birth of the modern state; some have snide comments to make about Israel's new materialism or its Orthodox hegemony; but nearly all have found some highly intellectual reason for remaining in the Diaspora, though a few did indeed admit they were a bit ashamed to do so. Rabbi Saul J. Berman, for example, is "profoundly distressed" that by remaining in "'exile'" he is denying himself the opportunity to participate in the challenge of the ongoing creation of the state; David R. Blumenthal is "embarrassed" that he does not "own property" in Israel; Marshall J. Breger thinks, "with some degree of sadness," that American Jews are losing interest in Israel; etc.

I feel for those who are torn in this way and can only say to them that it need not be so: it is not too hard to pull up roots and live in Israel. Many have done it and live comfortable (materially Americanized) lives—if that is what is worrying them. Everyone has an excuse, after all.

But responses like Rabbi Elliot N. Dorff's ("the greatest gift which American Judaism can impart to Israel is a sense of pluralism in Jewish expression") are nothing but rationalizations.

I do not believe that either the Israeli public or any Israeli institution is influenced (except materially) by the American Jewish community. The only way to influence or change anything that goes on in Israel is to live in the country and be a part of it. . . .

MARILYN MAGEN
Tel Aviv, Israel

TO THE EDITOR:

. . . The symposium asked very fundamental questions about Jews and their future, not only in America, but implicitly about the children of Israel as a whole. But only one respondent, Dennis Prager, answered the questions from a more fundamental, Torah-oriented perspective, a perspective outside the current framework of rabbinic Judaism. . . .

There is a very great distinction between a belief in God as defined by a divinely revealed Torah, and a belief in a titular Judaism as defined by rabbis. . . . This distinction between Torah and Talmud is crucial. . . . The Torah is the only common expression and measure of our identity; it is our constitution; it is what constitutes us as a people. Rabbinic Judaism was a political revolution that effectively overthrew God's Kingship . . . and God's legislative authority by instituting rule by a scholarly "lawyering" class. . . . In this respect, all rabbinic Judaism is essentially the same. Whether termed Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist, or something else, these groupings merely identify "political parties." . . . (And bear in mind that rabbis are nowhere named in the Torah. . . .)

It is worth noting that the most miserable stretch of Jewish history runs concurrently with the period of rabbinic governance. If rabbis had to run in an election on this record, they would have been thrown out of office long ago. . . .

NEVIN J. MINDLIN
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

TO THE EDITOR:

. . . I am a God-respecting, nonobservant Jew. I go to synagogue twice a year and fast on Yom Kippur. I belong to a Conservative congregation because I enjoy the singing and the ambience. I also support it because it is one of the very few congregations in the area that has a daily *minyan*. I think that the recital of Kaddish is a wonderful remembrance.

About fifteen years ago I attended a bat mitzvah at a Conservative congregation in Chicago. My mother was a member of the congregation, and she stood up to say Kaddish. Afterward, she told me that the prayer was for her father, for whom I am named (I was forty-five years old at the time). Yet as much as I respect this tradition, I no longer say yearly memorial prayers for my own father, who has been dead for over 40 years.

Unfortunately, my observance, or lack thereof, is not unusual. But I do recognize that Judaism will not survive without sustained and substantial observance. . . .

Although I agree with Rabbi Peter Knobel that dialogue is important, I disagree with him when he says that the future of Judaism is to be found in pluralism or dialogue. The future of Judaism rests with knowledge and observance. The Orthodox, especially the modern Orthodox, and observant Conservatives are the future strength of Judaism in the United States.

Let us nonobservant Jews who consider ourselves Jews recognize that we may be good people but that we are not good Jews, and support financially those institutions devoted to the study and observance of Judaism.

PHILIP J. SCHILLER
Chicago, Illinois

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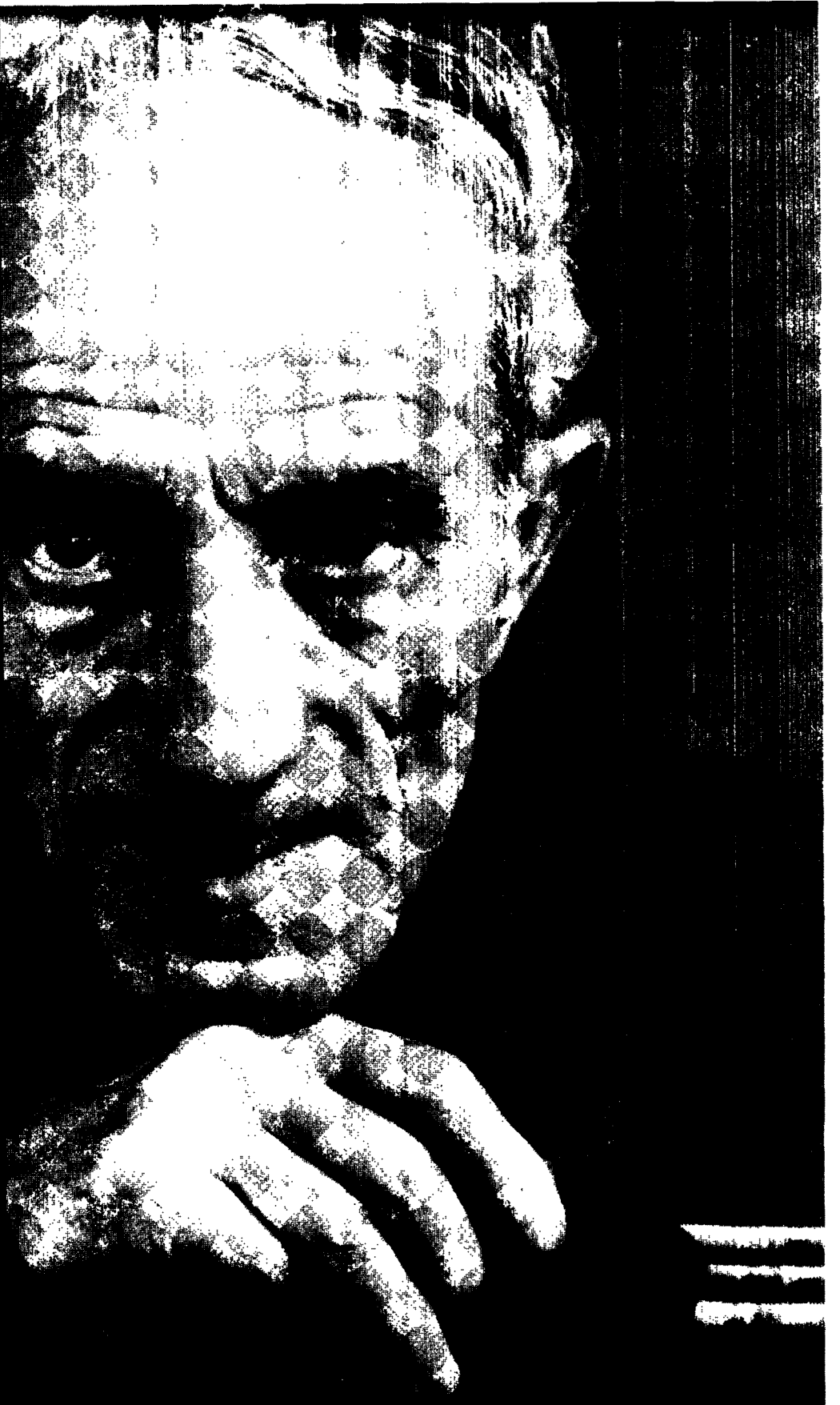

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TO THE EDITOR:

I am an Episcopalian who has been envious for years of the fact that we have never had a publication with intellectual integrity comparable to COMMENTARY: i.e., one that defines issues with clarity and boldly confronts differences with intellectual honesty.

In reading the symposium on American Jewish belief, I found it remarkable that the picture Jack Wertheimer draws of contemporary Judaism is so similar to that of Episcopalianism, which has also "ceased to be a coherent discipline." . . .

Aware of this disharmony, the National Cathedral in 1988 authorized a study . . . that was published in 1992 as *The Crisis in Moral Teachings in the Episcopal Church*. . . . Timothy Sedgwick, one of the volume's editors, found that "inadequate attempts on the part of the Episcopal Church in the United States to formulate moral teachings" have resulted in a

> cacophony that appears to have no bounds and to respect no differences. Instead of teaching, the Church increasingly yields to strident ideological debates. . . .

Thus, . . . the crisis in moral teachings in the Episcopal Church described by Sedgwick and others appears to parallel the crisis in Judaism today. . . .

DOUGLAS H. SCHEWE
Madison, Wisconsin

TO THE EDITOR:

The answers of the symposium contributors are rich, full of genuine faith, and provide penetrating insights into the Jewish mind and Jewish life. Something would be lost, however, if one or more analytical efforts were not made to assess this splendid compilation. . . . One might even get into the Olympic spirit and award a few gold medals. Thus, in my opinion, the gold for the answer to the first question, "Do you believe in God?," goes to Rabbi David L. Lieber, who writes:

> To me, "God" refers to the creative power at work bringing order out of chaos and maintaining the interrelatedness of all things. Who or what "God" stands for—a process, a being, a force—I do not know, *nor does anyone else*. [Emphasis added]

Other prizes for answers to this question go to Rabbi Marc Gellman and also to Nathan Lewin, who points out that belief is not as central as action in the Jewish tradition.

Everybody gave the correct answer to the second question—the Jews as a chosen people—even those who denied that the Jews enjoy that distinction. In contrast, no one got the question about the Holocaust right. How could they? Only poetry may be able, in time, to speak to that. . . .

No one did better than David Gelernter on the influence of American culture on Judaism. His description of a modern wedding between a Jew and a Gentile evokes both the pathos and the idiocy of present reality.

Arthur Green garners the prize for his answer to the question on the prospects for a large-scale revival of Judaism in America. He says:

> Wasn't Moses told somewhere in the middle of those chapters in Exodus on the Tabernacle, "If you build it, they will come"?

EDWIN T. HAEFELE
Alliance, Nebraska

TO THE EDITOR:

Though "believing in God" is not a matter of question and answer, like a catechism, but the human response to a divine trial, such as that of Abraham, . . . your symposium is instructive and a valuable source of theological pluralism.

ZE'EV W. FALK
Seminary of Judaic Studies Jerusalem, Israel

TO THE EDITOR:

Thank you for the outstanding August issue. Right after the *havdalah* ceremony marking the end of the Sabbath (and leaving my husband to work on the dishes!), I ran out to my local bookseller and scooped up the remaining issues on the shelf to give/mail to friends who are not yet subscribers.

Though I was surprised not to find responses from any hasidic thinkers/writers/rabbis or mention of Chabad/Lubavitch's unique role in bringing back Jews worldwide to Torah-observance, I submit the following list of respondents as the most inspirational/uplifting: David Berger, David R. Blumenthal, David Gelernter, Arthur Green, David Klinghoffer, Nathan Lewin, David Singer, Rabbi Harlan J. Wechsler, and Jack Wertheimer.

Yasher koach! (Did I say that right?) More power to you!

MITZI RACHLEFF CAHN
San Francisco, California

Dance in America

TO THE EDITOR:

Terry Teachout's article, "Who Killed Dance?" [July], is rife with misconceptions and exaggerations that I can neither ignore nor dismiss as ignorance.

Let me first ask where Mr. Teachout has noted a "palpable" lack of enthusiasm for new choreography. Evidently he was not at the Joyce Theater, New York's venue dedicated to dance, when Bill T. Jones premiered six works in June. Nor could he have attended Pilobolus's sold-out month-long run at the Joyce. What does he mean by "the near-complete lack of interest among the public at large" when the Joyce is filled to 90-percent capacity year-'round and the dance show, *Bring in 'Da Noise, Bring in 'Da Funk*, now sells out on Broadway after a full-capacity run at the Public Theater? Moreover, there are choreographers in residence in college and university modern-dance programs nationwide; the performances they give are attended by hundreds of modern dance's next generation. . . .

Mr. Teachout's flagrant exaggerations begin with his snide comments about Isadora Duncan. First, Duncan did take a ballet class or two: not only did she have early childhood lessons, but she also studied with Marie Bonfanti, the ballerina of *The Black Crook* fame. The reasons Duncan rejected ballet's classical technique, thereby opening the gates to modern dance, include her desire to free dance from confinement as well as to eliminate its European overtones. Creating a new form was as much an American pursuit as an aesthetic one.

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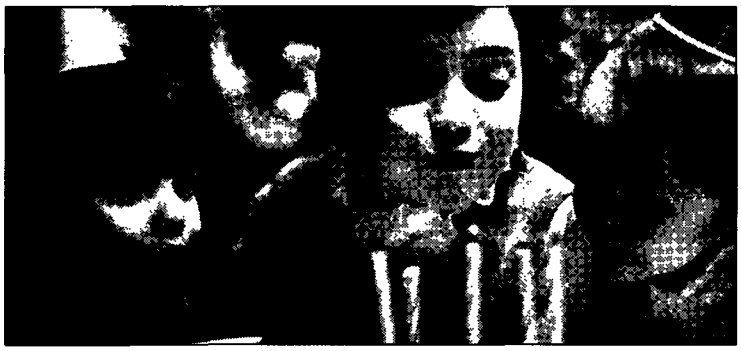

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Second, Mr. Teachout has obviously never seen a Ruth St. Denis solo if he dismisses something like *Incense* as "a forgettable dance." I have only seen it on black-and-white film performed by a seventy-plus St. Denis, but the rippling undulations of her seemingly boneless arms remain an indelible image.

Third, why does Mr. Teachout say that Twyla Tharp is the only choreographer of her generation to win fame? Why does he overlook Trisha Brown? Is he not aware that Tharp attained recognition by going beyond the concert-dance audience to choreograph *Hair* and to work with dance icon Mikhail Baryshnikov? Does he not know that it was Brown and not Tharp who was honored last summer by being invited to perform in the American Visionaries series at Lincoln Center? Or that Brown's company tours Europe to sold-out audiences while Tharp puts on, in Mr. Teachout's words, "uninteresting ballets" for American Ballet Theater?

The crux of Mr. Teachout's argument is that modern dance cannot survive because it lacks a "unanimity of vocabulary," even though this is the very characteristic of modern dance that distinguishes it from ballet. The wealth of movement possibilities outside the classical lexicon is what makes modern dance powerful and endlessly expressive. Not all architects design buildings in the same style: why should choreographers be expected to do so? . . .

In spite of Mr. Teachout's declaration that "there has never been a successful modern-dance repertory group," modern-dance companies based on repertory, as opposed to those that perform only one choreographer's output, do exist. The Alvin Ailey American Dance Company, Hubbard Street Dance Chicago, and the José Limón Dance Company perform the work of many choreographers and are highly successful and thriving. . . .

As for Mr. Teachout's observation that today's choreographers have tended overwhelmingly to be concerned less with movement than with politics, I suggest he see Bebe Miller's *The Hendrix Project*, Molissa Fenley's *Pola's*, or David Dorfman's *Kilter*. These three, which come to mind immediately, exemplify the great work being created today without heavy sociopolitical comment, and they all have been performed in the past year. As for Mr. Teachout's dismissal of Bill T. Jones's work as dealing with his "black, homosexual, and HIV-positive" status, he may want to see *Ballad*, *Blue Phrase*, and *Love Re-Defined* before criticizing them. All three were presented in Jones's most recent season and none focused on his appearance, sexual orientation, or health.

If Mr. Teachout wants to see dance that is beautifully anacreonic and blissfully risk-free in content, he has ample opportunity: many ballet companies present a classical repertory interspersed with safe works by modern choreographers, although these works are performed far better by the choreographer's own company: Paul Taylor's *Company B* is a perfect example. Leave modern dance to those of us who go to the theater to be moved, to be amazed, to have our beliefs challenged and reasserted. . . .

KATE G. MATTINGLY
New York City

TO THE EDITOR:

Terry Teachout makes several good points about the "slump" in American dance, but let me reassure him that dance in America is not dead, nor is it in any danger of dying. Mr. Teachout believes that the only hope for the future of dance is the classical ballet form, and that modern dance is merely "trendy" and "politically correct." . . . As a dancer, dance teacher, dance historian, and choreographer, I suggest that he review the history of dance farther back than the 18th century. That some modern dance is trendy and politically correct is true, but what art has *not* been—in any age? The question, of course, is: will something lasting evolve from the trendiness? My answer is a resounding yes—it already has.

Let us consider the real beginnings of modern dance by returning to the "Western" theater of 2,500 years ago and the choral dancing of classical Greece. Isadora Duncan based her movements on the dances of that Golden Age and merely revived a very natural form of dance. A generation of dancers followed her lead.

All modern-dance choreographers use the tradition of a naturally expressive torso (as opposed to the more constricted and restricted torso used in ballet) in their works, so that the various modern-dance techniques do have a "unanimity of vocabulary" and do express a "true language" that is recognizable to all cultures. So much for "outmoded vocabularies."

When Mr. Teachout laments the lack of a *lingua franca* among disciples of the Graham technique, the Cunningham technique, and "various other dialects," I would urge him to remember that classical-ballet devotees constantly argue the merits of Bournonville, Cecchetti, and "Russian" ballet techniques. . . .

The bottom line is: is dance in America alive and well? Yes, Mr. Teachout, there is a living dance legacy. How do I know this? Because I am there. Because there is a Martha Graham school of dance (among many others), and because Graham codified a vocabulary of modern dance as disciplined as any ballet barre. And because audition announcements reassure me that there is a need for dancers of all techniques. And because dance does not take place solely in New York City or its extensions—Miami and PBS; it takes place in university and college dance departments, dance camps and conferences, and in productions and dance schools throughout this country.

There are hundreds of dancers, choreographers, and dance teachers like me who work constantly to instill dance in all its facets in young people. And, yes, it is "relevant, inclusive, and multicultural"—whether ballet, modern, tap, or jazz—because dance is one of the most basic expressions of the human spirit. . . .

KAYE DEMETZ
Bergen Community College
Paramus, New Jersey

TO THE EDITOR:

. . . I support Terry Teachout's contention that classical ballet is the *lingua franca* of dance. . . .

I have more than a casual interest in dance in that I have choreographed ballets, danced with ballet companies, and performed in

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Broadway shows. Having studied with Martha Graham, José Limón, and others of that generation, I know at first hand the philosophy and training of modern dance. My major efforts, however, have been in ballet. Several years ago I made a career change from dancer to writer and I have published essays on dance.

It was during research for one of those essays that I discovered the following obituary, published in the English magazine *All Year Round*, September 3, 1864:

> After a long and distinguished life, the ballet has died among us and gone to its grave, unhonored even by a slight obituary notice. Once as much sought for in London as even that illustrious Italian guest, the opera herself, ballet is dead and gone. Her revengeful ghost usually haunts some scene of every grand opera, or revisits . . . footlights where burlesque or pantomime usurps her inheritance. But though her ghost walks, she is dead; dead past all galvanizing into life again . . .

But this writer did not understand that classical ballet . . . is a dynamic language system whose . . . expressive growth makes possible the replacement or adjustment of those parts that are no longer functional. Of course, some elements remain unaltered, maintaining stylistic unity. It is no accident that the ballets of George Balanchine, Jerome Robbins, and Eliot Feld are alive and well. These choreographers know how to use the language of classical ballet, how to modernize and enrich it according to its laws and not at whim.

Did anyone kill dance? I submit that the modern-dance movement died a natural death. Modern dance is based upon a process of smashing convention and tradition. Choreographers are propelled toward individualism. Like the dancing of Isadora Duncan, who assembled her dances with chance movements, modern dance is a "solo" art. The focus of attention is on personalities and the spectacle of performance. Emphasis is placed on the dancer and not the dance. . . .

In ballet, a choreographer has the option to rejuvenate ossified forms so that the dance can manifest new ideas. Classical ballet is flexible enough to embrace fresh ideas. . . .

ESTELLE T. BROWN
Bloomfield Hills, Michigan

TERRY TEACHOUT writes:

I am glad to know that Kate G. Mattingly likes modern dance. As I said in my piece, I like a good deal of it myself, and so I see no reason to quarrel with her particular enthusiasms (save to say that I do not share them) or discuss in detail the various other points she makes in her letter (most of which amount to differences of emphasis). Furthermore, I am well aware that in New York City, the dance capital of the world, there is an audience for every kind of choreography—including bad choreography.

Alas, the nationwide "slump" in dance is not a figment of my imagination but has been extensively reported (the *New York Times* runs a despairing piece about it every six months or so), and the fact that Kate Mattingly denies its existence says more about the cultish insularity of the modern-dance audience in

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Manhattan than about the situation in the larger world of dance in America. To Kate Mattingly and her fellow cultists, Trisha Brown may be famous; outside the tiny world of dance, she is unknown. Not so very long ago, the major figures of dance—including modern dance—really *were* famous. Nor was this merely a function of press agentry. From Serge Diaghilev in the 20's to Mark Morris in the 80's, their work successfully imposed itself on the general consciousness, as is sooner or later always the case with important art. If there were great new choreographers among us today, at least some of them would be as widely known as were, say, George Balanchine and Martha Graham, and their work would be the subject of discussion not merely by balletomanes but also by the educated public at large. Surely even Kate Mattingly realizes this is not the case.

As for the seeming exceptions, they prove the rule. Bill T. Jones does not get written about in the mass media because of his choreography: he gets written about because he chooses to incorporate identity politics into his work. If Jones were white, heterosexual, and HIV-negative, he would be exactly as famous as Trisha Brown.

I thank Estelle T. Brown for her letter, which speaks more than adequately to the points made by Kaye DeMetz.

Doing Justice

TO THE EDITOR:

How disappointing that an interesting dissertation on the biblical genesis of justice, "A Genealogy of Justice" by Leon R. Kass [July], should turn out to support "proper indignation" at governmental programs aiming at "social justice."

Surely the problem is in Mr. Kass's formulation of the demand for justice as a demand that "I get what I deserve." . . . I prefer a reformulation which I think is closer to an acceptable idea of justice: I do not have done to me what I do not deserve to have done to me.

In other words, I am not punished for a crime if I am not guilty. I do not get killed because I am a Jew. I do not get the short end of the social stick because I am black. Even, I do not incur God's wrath (and my destruction) because there is wickedness in the city. Abraham failed to teach God this lesson and thereby contributed to misleading Mr. Kass.

Under this formulation, programs aimed at ameliorating injustice can readily be *justified.*

ROBERT H. HAINES
New York City

LEON R. KASS writes:

How disappointing to be misread and misunderstood. I was not myself attacking government programs aimed at "social justice," but merely reminding their partisans that justice in such matters is more complicated than they are inclined to believe.

Precisely because most people insist on being treated as they think they deserve (for them, justice means *both* not getting the "badnesses" I don't deserve *and* getting the "goodnesses" I do), "it is naive to believe" (I quote my article) that such programs "will not arouse a quite proper indignation among those at whose expense the common good is being advanced"—especially if they are in no way responsible for the social evils being redressed. Thus, regarding, say, affirmative action, even on Robert H. Haines's preferred negative formulation of justice, some people may rightly regard themselves as unfairly getting "the short end of the social stick" because they are *not* black. A first-generation Asian daughter of a janitor, in no way responsible for the legacy of American slavery, is surely being treated unjustly when she loses a place at the Univer-

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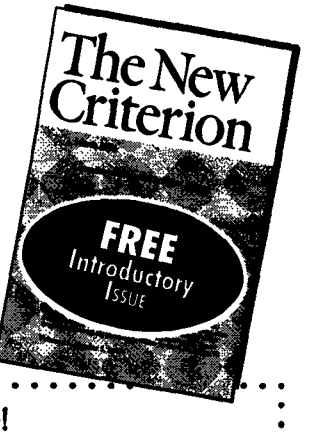

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sity of California to the prep-school-educated son of a black Congressman solely because every black applicant receives 300 bonus points in his application over all white and Asian applicants.

Even were one to concede to Mr. Haines (as I do not) that such practices are on balance justified, he surely must grant to the young Asian woman just grounds for proper indignation. Hence my point: those bent on what they regard as the greater justice of social programs are worse than naive if they deem unjustified the complaints of those who are made, unfairly, to pay the price. Unfortunately, those who are by wealth and privilege protected from paying such costs often add insult to injury by condemning as "sexists," "racists," or "angry white males" those less fortunate middle- and lower-class Americans whose ox is being gored—yes, undeservedly.

How disappointing, therefore, that Mr. Haines did not learn the chief lesson that I claimed God tries (successfully) to teach Abraham: political justice, *because* it is political, is never perfectly just (to each individual). But someone who knows (God alone knows how!) that God Himself needs lessons in the nature of justice is very little likely to learn anything from reading the Bible—or any other great book.

Rushdie's Mafia

TO THE EDITOR:

In "Salman Rushdie Surrenders" [July], Hillel Halkin's reference to Cochin as "the traditional home of India's native community of Jews, the Bene Israel" is factually incorrect. The Cochin Jews, known as Cochinites, are the smallest segment of Indian Jews, whereas the Bene Israel, the most numerous, inhabit the west coast of the Indian State of Maharashtra. The Baghdadi Jews, who come in between these two groups, are divided between Bombay and Calcutta.

Mr. Halkin is, however, absolutely right in questioning Salman Rushdie's risibly improbable choice in his book, *The Moor's Last Sigh*, of the Zogoibys, Abraham and Moraes, as a Jewish mafia. Indian Jews are known to be among the most law-abiding and productive citizens of India, a proudly secular and democratic country which has never preached or practiced anti-Semitism. Indian Jews have been prominent in medicine, law, films, the textile and spice business, government services, and in the armed forces (e.g. Rear Admiral Sanson and Lt. General Frederick Raphael Jacob, who was one of the commanders of the victorious Indian army in the liberation of Bangladesh, 1971). . . .

Significantly, Indian Jews have never been moneylenders, an occupation which they were forced to practice in Muslim and Christian countries because they were debarred from other occupations. Even today there are flourishing Jewish institutions in India such as the Mogen David synagogue in Bombay, the Elly Kadourie high school, the David Sassoon Institute, and the world famous Cochin synagogue. In contrast, the only synagogue in Pakistan, in Karachi, is today a warehouse, following the liquidation and eviction of all Pakistani Jews.

These are, of course, inconvenient facts for Salman Rushdie, who should also know that the extensive crime groups of Bombay are Muslim mafias controlled by Muslims in the Gulf states. He would be hard-put to find a Jewish criminal in Bombay either today or in the past.

ANAND G. CHANDAVARKAR
Washington, D.C.

HILLEL HALKIN writes:

I thank Anand G. Chandavarkar for his letter, which strengthens the point I sought to make in my article.

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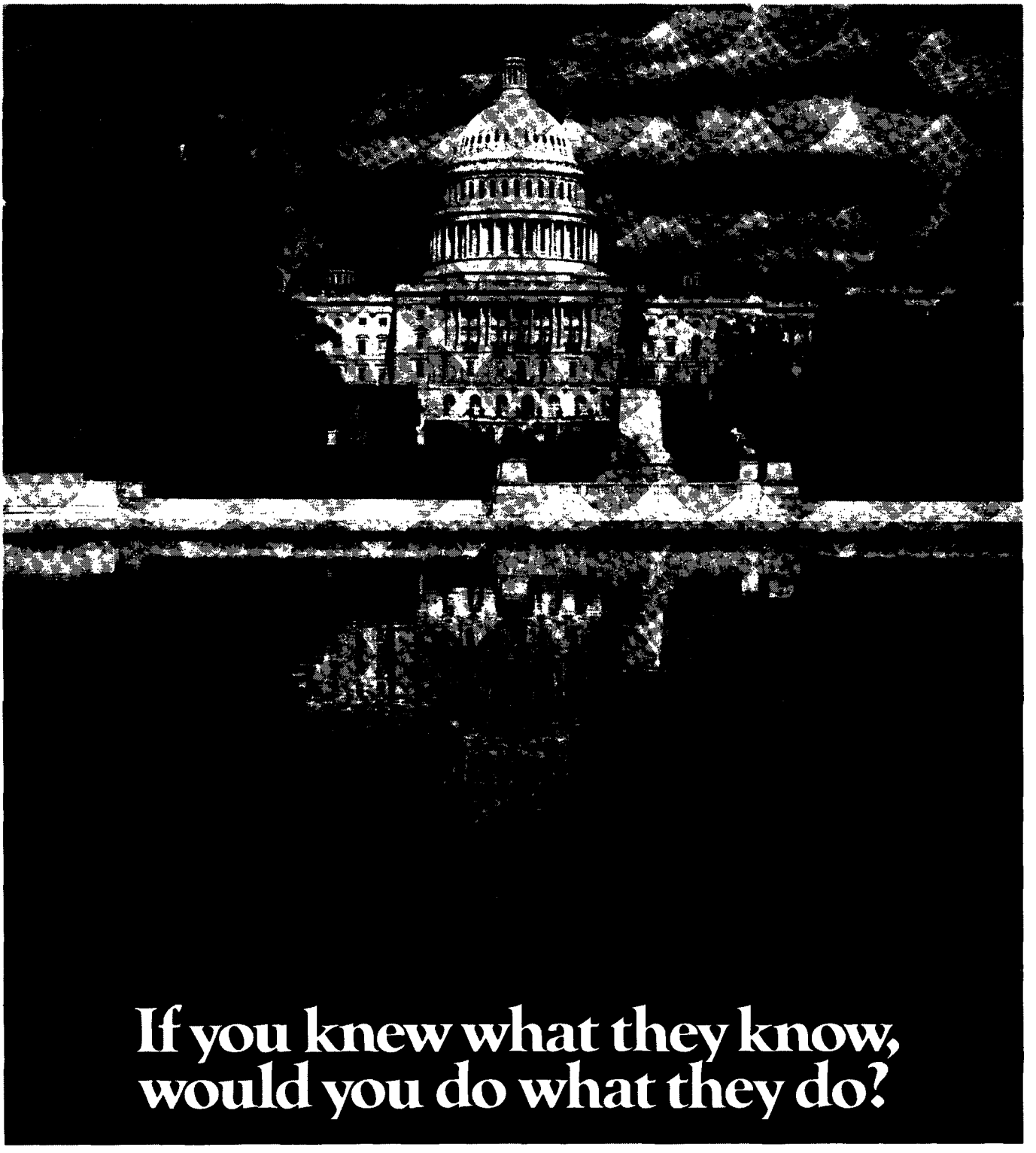

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Commentary
November 1996

The Last Freedom:
Religion, the Constitution, and the Schools

Joseph P. Viteritti

THE DEBATE over the proper relationship between church and state, a debate as old as the Republic, has in our time taken on fresh intensity. The flashpoints range from abortion to the role of the so-called religious Right in American politics, but among the most delicate issues involved are those concerning education, in particular public support for private and parochial schools.

As is usual when it comes to education, much of the battle lately has been taking place on the local level. Thus, in 1990, at the urging of black parents frustrated with the wretched quality of the schools, a law was passed in Wisconsin making taxpayer-funded scholarships available so that poor families in Milwaukee could send their children to schools of their choosing, be they public or private; but when in 1995 the law was amended to include parochial schools, the Wisconsin supreme court held that this violated federal and state constitutional standards for the separation of church and state, and put a temporary stop to the program just before the school year was to begin. In Cleveland, Ohio, the constitutionality of a similar program was upheld by a state trial court, but is now under appeal. Meanwhile, in New York City, a brouhaha has erupted over the offer of the Catholic Archdiocese to take 1,000 of the worst-performing students in the public-school system and educate them in Catholic schools. The chancellor of New York's Board of Education, Rudy Crew, declared that he would accept the offer only if the Archdiocese found private funds to pay for the program, *and* if the schools involved removed any signs, indications, or lessons marking them as religious.

As in Milwaukee and Cleveland, the subject under discussion in New York quickly changed from the ills of public education to the establishment clause of the First Amendment ("Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion") and what it signifies. And that requires us to take a quick look back at history.

The idea of a religious establishment had a quite specific meaning in 18th-century Europe, where it referred to a single official church supported by public funds. This was a condition common in many countries in which ecclesiastic and state authority were still closely intermingled, and where membership in the established church was required to hold public office or to be eligible for other social privileges. But in colonial America, owing to the distinct origin of each settlement, religious establishment took on a more ambiguous, and a more diffuse, significance. In

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most of New England, each town selected its own minister—usually a Congregationalist—and supported him with local taxes; New York, although favoring Anglicanism, was slightly more pluralistic; Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, Delaware, and New Jersey had no establishments at all; in the South, the Anglican establishment was replaced by a system of nonpreferential aid that taxed citizens to support the churches of their choice.

This pattern of diversity was carried over into the early decades of the Republic. By the time the First Congress adopted the Bill of Rights in 1789, every state except Connecticut had a constitutional provision protecting religious freedom, but only in a limited sense. Six states granted the right to theists only; all but two required religious tests for public office; in some, the franchise was conditioned upon membership in a Christian church, and a person could be criminally prosecuted for not observing the Sabbath. But more important for our purposes is the fact that in almost all states, education was deemed inseparable from religious instruction, and responsibility for providing both resided with the clergy.

As it happens, the establishment clause of the First Amendment applied to none of these arrangements, being designed merely to prevent the establishment of a *national* church. And in the meantime, the same Congress that drafted the Bill of Rights also voted to support chaplains in the military and in both of its own houses, and used these words in reenacting the Northwest Ordinance and providing for a system of schools: "Religion, morality, and knowledge being necessary to good government . . . schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged."

IT IS a measure of the distance we have traversed from such elastic early understandings that today's conventional wisdom should be the one reflected in many of the arguments put forward in the court cases in Wisconsin and Ohio and in the position adopted so reflexively by the New York City schools chancellor—namely, that an impenetrable "wall of separation" (in Thomas Jefferson's metaphor) is needed to protect government and religion from each other, and that the First Amendment enshrines that principle in constitutional law. To be sure, there are some legal historians who argue that the First Amendment was never intended to prohibit government support to religion so long as it was not limited to a single established church. But theirs is decidedly a minority view. Most contemporary scholars favor an interpretation of the First Amendment that proscribes any direct aid to sectarian institutions,* and over the last 50 years this interpretation has found its way into the reasoning of the Supreme Court.

The landmark opinion was written in 1947 by Justice Hugo Black, who in *Everson* v. *Board of Education* invoked the Jeffersonian metaphor of a wall of separation to extend the strictures of the establishment clause from the federal government to the states. That decision, in turn, gave rise to a number of subsequent judicial actions regulating the relationship between religion and education. But not until 1971, in *Lemon* v. *Kurzman*, did the Court take a giant step by promulgating a three-part test, the so-called *Lemon* test, forbidding any government action in this sphere that (1) had no secular purpose; (2) had a "primary effect" of advancing religion; or (3) fostered "excessive entanglement" between church and state.

Two years later, in *Committee for Public Education* v. *Nyquist*, the Court invalidated a New York law that had offered tuition allotments for the poor and tax relief to parents sending their children to private and parochial schools. Focusing on the second prong of the *Lemon* test, the Court noted that "insofar as such benefits render assistance to parents who send their children to sectarian schools, their purpose and inevitable effect are to aid and advance those religious institutions."

Here, and in a whole string of other cases in the 1970's, a pattern was set whereby the wholly secular purpose of improving educational opportunities for disadvantaged children became entangled in the Court's preoccupation with preventing any benefit, however incidental, to church-connected schools. Not surprisingly, the resulting decisions were tortured in their reasoning and confusing in their effect. Thus, loans of textbooks by public-school systems to nonpublic schools were approved on the grounds that they could be considered a financial benefit "to parents and children, not to the nonpublic schools"—though even so, the Court worried lest the textbooks become "instrumental in the teaching of religion." But while lending textbooks was approved, lending instructional materials and equipment was deemed to have "the unconstitutional effect of advancing religion because of the predominantly religious character of the schools

* See Leonard W. Levy, *The Establishment Clause: Religion and the First Amendment* (1994).

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benefiting from the act." Again, although it was permissible to provide bus transportation to parochial schools, the Court found that states were under no obligation to provide the same level of service to public- and parochial-school students; in addition, a bus ride to a park or a museum *from* a parochial school was declared to be in violation of the Constitution. And so forth.

The ultimate message conveyed by all this convoluted decision-making, routinely justified on grounds of protecting religious liberty, was that public money allocated for education belonged not to taxpayers and their children but to the public-school "system." By definition, families wanting to provide their children with an education reflecting their religious values stood outside that system and its aims, and were entitled to none of its benefits.

THE ECONOMIC disadvantage at which this put religious families was one thing, and perhaps could be regarded by them as a price that had to be paid. But something else has been going on in recent decades which, in the name of religious freedom, has amounted to a positive infringement on *their* freedom: namely, the transformation of the public schools into vehicles of a secularist orthodoxy which is not merely neutral on questions of religious faith and values but positively hostile.

Consider, for example, the predicament of religious parents in New York City who cannot afford a private religious education and whose children therefore end up in the public schools. Several years ago, such parents were confronted with a new sex-education program that involved the distribution of condoms. When the program was implemented, a number of Catholic and Jewish groups pleaded for "opt-out" alternatives, so that their children would not have to be subjected to teachings which actively violated the precepts of their respective religions. To this, the Board of Education turned a deaf ear: for parents offended by the program, the only "opt-out" provision was to leave the public-school system altogether and exercise their religious freedom at their own expense—or, to put it more accurately, to accept a significant financial penalty, imposed by the state, for holding their religious beliefs in the first place.

Although the program in question has since been revised, the militantly secularist ethos embodied in it remains an animating factor in public education throughout the country, protected by a whole line of Supreme Court decisions. Nor is this all: in a period in which, under the banner of multiculturalism, educators have gone to the ends of the earth to show "sensitivity" to minorities defined by race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation, the line of tolerance has been peremptorily drawn at individuals whose identity is defined by faith.

Fortunately, however, that is not quite the whole story. Not only are local initiatives like the ones in Wisconsin, Ohio, and New York City becoming more common, whatever temporary setbacks they may encounter, but the Supreme Court itself has entered upon a reconsideration of its jurisprudence. I would trace the beginning of the change to 1983, when, in *Meuller* v. *Allen*, the Court upheld a Minnesota statute granting a tax deduction to families for expenses incurred for tuition, textbooks, and transportation. The relief was made available to *all* parents, regardless of whether their children attended public, private, or parochial schools.

This decision was notable not only because it validated benefits for parochial-school parents, but for two other reasons as well: it drew a distinction between direct and indirect aid to religious institutions (the former being prohibited, the latter permitted), *and* it endorsed the concept of parental choice. Writing for the majority, Justice William Rehnquist asserted that

> aid to parochial schools [was being made] available only as a result of decisions of individual parents . . . [and] no "imprimatur of state approval". . . . can be deemed to have been conferred on any particular religion, or on religion generally.

While recognizing that most of the parents who had taken advantage of the program sent their children to Catholic schools, Rehnquist, who was about to become Chief Justice, deemed that it was time to relax the "primary-effect" prong of the *Lemon* test.

Continuing the line of *Meuller*, a unanimous Court ruled in 1986 that the First Amendment was not violated when a (blind) student used a public scholarship to attend a Bible college. In 1990, the Court held that public schools must allow student religious clubs to meet on campus under the same terms as other clubs; to do otherwise, the Court reasoned, would violate First Amendment freedom-of-association and free-exercise-of-religion rights (as well as the Fourteenth Amendment), and would demonstrate "not neu-

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trality but hostility toward religion." In 1993, the Court upheld the right of a Catholic high-school student to receive the services of a sign-language interpreter at public expense. And in 1995 the Court rejected an attempt by the University of Virginia to exclude a student newspaper with a religious message from the services and benefits that were awarded to other student organizations on campus.

All in all, the First Amendment jurisprudence that has been evolving over the last fifteen years suggests a shift in balance, with the Court relaxing the strict approach to the Amendment's establishment clause that prevailed in the prior decade and relying more heavily on the clause immediately following it, the one which guarantees "free exercise." In the University of Virginia case, Justice Anthony Kennedy distinguished neatly between "government speech endorsing religion, which the establishment clause forbids, and private speech endorsing religion, which the free-exercise clause protects." In so doing, the Court has also begun to set standards that would permit the government to support school choice if three criteria are met:

1. Public aid is given to an individual parent or student rather than to an institution.

2. Any benefit accrued by an institution is the result of individual choices made by the parent or student.

3. Aid is appropriated on a religiously neutral basis to those who attend private and parochial schools as well as to those who attend public schools.

OPPONENTS OF this trend say that it represents an aberration from the Court's by-now longstanding tradition of maintaining a wall of separation between church and state. In fact, however, the opposite is true: what is going on is more akin to a restoration. *Everson* notwithstanding, up until the early 1970's the Supreme Court was clearly accommodationist on this issue, and was especially sympathetic to the rights of parents wishing to determine the kind of schooling their children would have. As early as 1925, the Court supported parental prerogatives in the face of a compulsory-education law (itself motivated by anti-Catholic sentiment) that would have required all children in Oregon to attend public school. As the Court explained in *Pierre* v. *Society of Sisters*:

> The child is not the mere creature of the state; those who nurture him and direct his destiny have the right, coupled with the high duty, to recognize and prepare him for additional obligations.

Five years later, in *Cochran* v. *Board of Education*, upholding a Louisiana law that set aside tax funds to supply textbooks for children in public, private, and parochial schools, the Court enunciated a "child-benefit theory": although some of the participating students attended sectarian institutions, nevertheless "the schoolchildren and the state alone are the beneficiaries."

Even *Everson* is less clear-cut than strict separationists make it out to be. In addition to containing Justice Black's edict on the wall of separation, the decision supported the right of parochial-school children to receive transportation services at public expense. To be consistent with the establishment clause of the First Amendment, wrote the majority, the state of New Jersey could not "contribute tax funds to the support of an institution which teaches the tenets of faith of any church." But, on the other hand, the Court went on:

> [O]ther language of the Amendment commands that New Jersey cannot hamper its citizens in the free exercise of their own religion. Consequently, it cannot exclude Catholics, Lutherans, Mohammedans, Baptists, Jews, Methodists, Nonbelievers, Presbyterians, or the members of any faith, because of their faith or lack of it, from receiving the benefits of public-welfare legislation.

Finally, in 1970, just one year prior to issuing the *Lemon* standard, the Court upheld tax exemptions for religious institutions and endorsed the principle of "benevolent neutrality" as opposed to total separation (*Walz* v. *Tax Commission*). Even the *Lemon* opinion itself contains language that should be discomfiting to any strict separationist:

> Our prior holdings do not call for a total separation between church and state; total separation is not possible in an absolute sense. Some relationship between government and religious organizations is inevitable.

True, just as the prior history of Court jurisprudence is nowhere near so seamless as strict separationists like to argue, the Court's recent record is not totally consistent, either. The most notable exception to the new pattern of accommodation occurred in 1990, when the Court ruled, in *Oregon Department of Human Resources* v.

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Smith, that religious believers are not entitled to exemptions from generally applicable governmental requirements. But this decision, which seemed to fly in the face of a long line of cases dealing with religious minorities—from conscientious objectors in the military to Amish seeking exemptions from compulsory-education laws—elicited a response from other branches of government that was itself noteworthy. The Religious Freedom Restoration Act, signed into law by President Clinton in 1993, prohibits the government from burdening a person's exercise of religion unless it can be demonstrated that the burden "is in furtherance of a compelling governmental interest" and "is the least restrictive means of furthering" that interest. The federal courts are still trying to determine whether the Act amounts to an unconstitutional attempt by Congress to usurp judicial power and overturn *Smith*; however that question gets resolved, the Act itself affirms a growing sentiment in the nation that is already, as we have seen, exerting an influence on public policy.

STILL, THE direction of events is by no means certain. Last year, President Clinton signed a "Memorandum on Religion in Schools." Proclaiming that the First Amendment "does not convert schools into religion-free zones," he instructed the Secretary of Education and the Attorney General to develop guidelines on the appropriate role of religion in public-school districts. The memorandum was itself a response to a document drafted by an unusual coalition of Jewish, Christian, Muslim, and civil-rights groups, and both the initial document and the executive memorandum may be seen as signs of accommodation to the new public mood. But both are inadequate at best.

For example, the consensus document declares the right of students in public schools to read their Bibles and pray in informal settings; at the same time, out of concern for students who choose not to pray, or who might be offended by prayer, it *prohibits* any form of official religious prayer. Elsewhere, it urges that school administrators be given substantial discretion to *excuse* students from lessons which, for religious reasons, are objectionable to them or their parents.

Note the difference between the two sets of injunctions. In the first instance, whether or not prayer is considered a normal part of the school day by a majority of the community, individual students are to be saved the embarrassment of non-participation in it by virtue of a general prohibition. By contrast, no such effort to avoid stigmatization is on display in the case of students who may not want to hear, for example, what the Board of Education thinks they should know about sex; at most, they are to be excused from a prescribed school activity and allowed to leave the room where it is taking place. Once again, the secularist "system" decides what is or is not legitimate, and once again religion is put on the defensive.

Of course, even under the best of circumstances, and with all the good will in the world, it would be extremely difficult to force the square peg of religion into the round hole of secularism—even a secularism more neutral than the current brand of government-enforced anti-religion. Christian groups, for example, have advocated the right to conduct prayer of some sort in public classrooms. But in addition to all the other valid objections that can be raised against this idea, it is highly improbable that any real prayer could be composed under such auspices that would not succeed in offending other religious minorities. What would result from the process of negotiation would inevitably be so devoid of spiritual meaning as hardly to merit being called a prayer.

To say this, however, is not to give up on the search for accommodation but to expose the need for a genuine accommodation. Our Bill of Rights, written to protect individuals from excessive governmental power, has from time to time been used in ways that tend unduly to impose that power on the truly religious among us, and to burden them in the exercise of their rights. For anyone who still adheres to the liberal tradition of tolerance, here is perhaps the last frontier of freedom.

If government-run schools are to remain secular, as no doubt they should, there is no good reason why the devoutly religious should not have alternatives—just as they do in other free nations, from Canada to Europe to Australia—that would permit them to educate their children in a setting that supports their values and convictions, under state-imposed educational standards but without taint, without encumbrance, and without financial penalty. This goal, which can be achieved without giving direct support to religious institutions, strikes a balance between the disestablishment of religion and its free exercise—the inextricably twinned aims of the First Amendment. It is sound public policy, it is fair, and it has even been upheld as constitutional by the United States Supreme Court.

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Was T.S. Eliot a Scoundrel?

John Gross

T.S. Eliot's anti-Semitism is back in the news. Over recent months there has been a spate of articles, first in Britain and then in the United States, prompted by the appearance of a new book, Anthony Julius's *T.S. Eliot, Anti-Semitism, and Literary Form*.* Some of these articles—for such are the ways of journalism—have presented the subject as though it were a revelation; but for many of Eliot's readers it is, of course, an old story, one they have been living with for a long time. Reading Julius and his reviewers, I found my own thoughts turning inescapably personal, reflection giving way to recollection.

I first discovered Eliot in 1950, when I was fifteen. Not a particularly daring discovery, it might be said—after all, he had already won the Nobel Prize, and the great works on which his reputation still rests, from "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (1915) to *Four Quartets* (1943), had long since achieved their positions of renown. But the school I attended in London had an old-fashioned approach to literature, and he was not yet on the curriculum. In addition to his other charms he had the attraction of being an "unofficial" author, someone you had to explore under your own steam.

Fascinated by the poems I had already come across in anthologies, I moved on to his collected works. When I did, the anti-Semitic streak was one of the first things that struck me: the (lower-case) "jew" squatting on the window sill ("Gerontion"); the (lower-case) "jew" who was "underneath the lot" ("Burbank with a Baedeker; Bleistein with a Cigar"); Rachel, "*née* Rabinovich," tearing at grapes "with murderous paws" ("Sweeney Among the Nightingales")—how could one fail to notice such things? That they were anti-Semitic, and nasty, I never doubted. But I was also content to think of them as no more than blemishes. They did not deflect me from my admiration for Eliot as a whole, or indeed from my general admiration for the poems in which they appeared. And if I am to be honest, I was as much intrigued as affronted. Here was something different—anti-Semitism with a smart new twist.

Or perhaps I was more shaken than I was willing to admit, since soon afterward I felt impelled to mention the subject to my father. I am not sure whether he had ever heard of Eliot. Having come to England from Poland at the age of fourteen, he had had little opportunity to develop a

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* Cambridge, 308 pp., $49.95.

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taste for English poetry; as a hard-working doctor in a poor neighborhood, he devoted most of his limited reading time to his Jewish interests and to current politics. But he greatly respected the idea of literature, and it seemed entirely natural that I should tell him about my new enthusiasm. What was less predictable was that I should also feel it necessary to let him know about the anti-Semitism.

When I had had my say, either quoting or paraphrasing some offending lines, my father's only comment was: "T.S. Eliot may be a great poet, but he isn't greater than the Jewish people." I was very struck by this—not so much by the sentiment as by the manner in which it was expressed, very different from his normally easy-going, non-rhetorical style. He was perfectly calm, but it was obvious he had been upset.

We let the subject drop. But I felt bad about it, and a couple of weeks later, as a tacit peace-offering, I read him W.H. Auden's philo-Semitic poem from the 30's, "Refugee Blues." His first reaction was rather tetchy. Why were German Jews the only ones Auden mentions? What about other Jews? What about (by implication) Jews from Eastern Europe? When, however, I explained that the poem had been written before the war, he agreed that this was an unreasonable objection. Yes, Auden was clearly a good thing, and meanwhile I had established my general point that there was no necessary connection between modern poetry and obnoxious opinions.

The incident, or so it seemed, was closed. A few more weeks went by. And then one day he suddenly remarked, with nothing in particular to prompt him, "You know, T.S. Eliot would be very interested in a man like Abramsky."

This was serious. Yehezkel Abramsky was the most renowned talmudic scholar in London—the only one (as far as I know) for whom my father felt the kind of unreserved respect he would have felt for the great masters back in Eastern Europe. Abramsky was the standard by which others were judged.

My response was a mild sense of helplessness. I found the idea of Eliot's getting to know Abramsky so improbable that I wanted to smile; I found it hard to believe that he would have taken much interest in him if he had. That was not the way things worked. At the same time, the remark suggested that my father had been more disturbed than I realized—and that he still was.

In terms of the culture in which he had grown up, Abramsky represented Authority; now, looking back, I think he had intuited that for me Eliot represented Authority, too. In putting forward Abramsky's name, he was not necessarily trying to pit one Authority against another: he no doubt hoped that somehow, somewhere, the two could be reconciled. But the anti-Semitism which he might have regarded as a routine hazard in another writer was much more troubling in an author whom I gave the impression of looking up to as a lawgiver, a permanent point of reference.

I CANNOT recall our ever speaking about Eliot again, and possibly my father forgot the whole business. He was not notably thin-skinned about such matters: he had enjoyed reading G.K. Chesterton, for instance, and certainly did not need to be told about *his* anti-Semitism. Meanwhile, though, my own fascination with Eliot continued, to be reinforced in college during the very years—the mid-50's—when Eliot's influence was at its most pervasive.

Naturally I did not forget about the anti-Semitism—on the contrary, I tried to find out more about it—but once again, if I am to be honest, any indignation I felt was tempered by curiosity and the pleasures of detective work. I can still remember the thrill I felt walking through a street not far from the church of St. Magnus Martyr (so memorably invoked in *The Waste Land*) and noticing an old office nameplate bearing an unusual name—"Bleistein." My one original contribution to Eliot scholarship; like a lot of the minor research he has attracted, what it primarily offered was the satisfaction of picking up a clue in a literary game.

The main reason I was not deeply bothered by the anti-Semitic passages is that there was so much *else* in Eliot. Vivid and unignorable though the references were, they represented a relatively small aspect of his work. It helped, too, that I was never particularly drawn to Eliot as a social thinker, a side of him that was mostly revealed in his prose rather than in poetry. In the first flush of schoolboy enthusiasm, I had read *Notes Toward a Definition of Culture*, which had appeared only a couple of years before, and it had struck me as pretty dull: if I wanted expositions of conservative philosophy or disquisitions on cultural decline, I could find more exciting examples elsewhere. No, the authority which he exercised was essentially literary. And even here, while his work may have colored my picture of the world in ways I did not altogether realize, the note to which I responded most strongly had very little

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to do with ideology or doctrine. That note, despite Eliot's own notorious insistence on poetic impersonality, was the note of romantic longing—the note of the hyacinth girl in *The Waste Land* (1922), of the drowning Prufrock, of "the waste sad time" in *Four Quartets*, "stretching before and after."

But I do not want to suggest that my attitude toward the offending passages was simply one of resignation. Every so often a feeling of anger would flare up; every so often I would look at them as though for the first time, and be aghast. I can even recall suddenly becoming annoyed with, of all things, *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*: here was a work first published in 1939, on the eve of Hitler's war, and it was all so . . . cozy. On another occasion I was rereading "Burbank with a Baedeker"—

> The rats are underneath the piles.
> The jew is underneath the lot.
> Money in furs . . .

—when it occurred to me (I had never made the connection before) that many of my mother's family happened to be furriers. What was I doing with this miserable stuff?

It would have been much easier if there had been some public discussion of the issue, some acknowledgment of a problem. Instead, there was silence. When I began looking for guidance, the first extended accounts of Eliot's work I read—there was not much else available—were F.O. Matthiessen's *The Achievement of T.S. Eliot* (1935), and the relevant chapters in Edmund Wilson's *Axel's Castle* (1921) and F.R. Leavis's *New Bearings in English Poetry* (1932). I made allowances for the fact that all three books had been published before World War II, two of them before 1933; even so, I was surprised at what I found. Matthiessen and Leavis discuss the offending poems but have nothing to say about their anti-Semitic aspect. Wilson, discussing "Burbank with a Baedeker," mentions that one of the protagonists is "a vulgar Austrian Jew," but that hardly seems an adequate way to sum up the ferocities visited upon Bleistein (an American Jew, by the way—"Chicago Semite Viennese"—as well as an Austrian one), or the extent to which the poem seems to be aimed at Jews in general, or indeed the presence in it of a second undesirable Jew, Sir Ferdinand Klein.

An exhaustive trawl through the first 20 or 30 years of Eliot criticism would no doubt reveal scattered objections to his anti-Semitism, but I do not believe the books I read were unrepresentative. Another book available in 1950, but which I did not know of at the time, was *T.S. Eliot: A Selected Critique*, edited by Leonard Ungar. First published in 1948, it consists of over 30 essays or extracts from longer studies by distinguished writers ranging from Cleanth Brooks to Mario Praz, from E.M. Forster to Harold Laski. Here, too, comment on the anti-Semitic passages is (to modern eyes) conspicuous by its absence.

I can understand—up to a point—why early writers on Eliot avoided the subject. They were still engaged in fighting the battles of modernism; their minds were on other things. But after World War II, the silence began to seem positively eerie, and although a number of writers touched on the problem toward the end of the 1940's, most notably in the columns of COMMENTARY,* there was very little follow-up. During the 50's, mainstream commentators on Eliot still had virtually nothing to say—or on occasion, less than nothing. In one influential study, *T.S. Eliot's Poetry and Plays* (1956), Grover Smith remarks jauntily that "the question whether 'Burbank with a Baedeker' [is] anti-Semitic is obviously not a pressing one"; it suffices, Smith adds, that the poem is "in execrable taste."

IN THE 1960's all this began to change. As critics turned their attention (mostly unfavorable) to Eliot's highly conservative politics, the question of anti-Semitism inevitably came under the spotlight—and there it has remained. During the past 30 years, articles and sections of books have been devoted to it; it has been aired in the press; passing references to it in literary and historical works have become commonplace.

The treatment Eliot has received in this respect is hardly unique: we live in an age in which the work of any writer is liable to be closely scrutinized for traces of racism, sexism, or other alleged derelictions. In many cases, such scrutiny is excessive and misplaced; but in Eliot's case, given both his stature and the intensity of the "traces," it is well justified.

Since 1971, moreover, the record has looked somewhat darker than it did before. In that year

* See, for example, Milton Hindus, "F. Scott Fitzgerald and Literary Anti-Semitism" (June 1947); Leslie Fiedler, "What Can We Do About Fagin?" (May 1949); and some of the contributors to the symposium, "The Jewish Writer and English Literary Tradition" (September and October 1949).

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the poet's widow Valerie published the original draft of *The Waste Land*, together with a number of drafts of previously unpublished shorter poems. One of them, "Dirge" (probably written in 1921), reintroduces the character of Bleistein. Here he has been drowned; he lies "lower than the wharf rats dive"; he is once again identified as a (lower-case) "jew"; and his face has been horribly mutilated by sea creatures. It is a vile poem, even worse than one might have guessed from the worst things Eliot chose to publish.

Still, in view of all that has been written about the subject, is an entire book on it really called for? How much more can be said about an issue which ultimately revolves around a half-dozen brief passages of verse and a few fairly obscure passages of prose? The answer that emerges from Anthony Julius's book is: a great deal. Those passages have far-reaching implications; they can only be fully understood in their historical context; the whole topic bristles with complexities; and Julius needs every inch of his space to do them justice.

Julius is a lawyer—his book has attracted a good deal of fortuitous publicity on account of the fact that he also happens to have represented Princess Diana in her divorce—and he bears the unmistakable stamp of his trade. Occasionally you feel that his approach is a bit too forensic: a point is rammed home too hard, an argument is couched in excessively cut-and-dried terms, the jury is bombarded with more evidence than it needs. At the same time, however, he shows the instincts of a critic no less than those of a lawyer, and he is never in serious danger of confusing a literary verdict with a legal one. At the heart of his case, indeed, are a recognition that the works in which the anti-Semitic passages occur have their poetic power (how much simpler life would be if they did not), and an insistence that Eliot's anti-Semitic imaginings cannot be cordoned off from his work as a whole. The verdict he finally asks for is "Guilty as charged, alas."

THERE ARE many instances of anti-Semitism in literature that seem to me best forgotten, and many others that do not warrant more than a footnote. If, in Eliot's case, a guilty verdict still seems called for, it is largely on account of his failure to make amends—and here Julius is at his strongest.

The anti-Semitic passages in the poetry were written in the years 1913-21, when Eliot was in his early thirties. It was a period in which the excesses to which anti-Semitism could lead were perfectly apparent; anyone with eyes to see had only to read a decent newspaper to learn about the terrible atrocities then being committed in the Ukraine. Nor is it possible to dismiss the passages as examples of mere "drawing-room" anti-Semitism: they are far too ferocious and extreme for that.

Still, we can concede that 1913-21 was not 1933-45. Those years marked a decisive turning point, when what might previously have been shrugged off suddenly took on a far more sinister look. It is instructive to compare Eliot at this point with a gifted lesser writer, John Buchan, author of *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1915) and other classic modern thrillers. At around the time Eliot was dreaming up Bleistein, Buchan was also putting a number of sharply anti-Semitic references into his books; but after the Nazis came to power, he was quick to denounce their persecutions of Jews. In the spring of 1934, for example, he addressed a mass rally in London's East End at which he spoke of the "centuries of cruelty and wrong" which Jews had endured. This may not entirely have put paid to the problem raised by his earlier utterances, but it is bound to modify our feelings about them; and we would surely take a much more lenient view of Eliot's earlier offenses if he had later spoken out in the same spirit.

What happened was very different. In 1933, Eliot delivered a series of lectures at the University of Virginia, published the following year under the title *After Strange Gods*. In the course of them, he dwelled on the virtues of a homogeneous, stable, highly traditional social order, and added that for those who sought to realize such an ideal, "reasons of race and religion combine to make any large number of free-thinking Jews undesirable."

The most that can be said in mitigation of this remark (it is not very much) is that at the time, Eliot may not have registered the full scale of what was happening in Germany. Possibly he began to regret his words soon after they were published, and possibly this was one of the reasons he allowed *After Strange Gods* to go out of print. But the remark was still part of the record, and as the 1930's wore on, it stood more in need of redress than ever. So did the anti-Semitic passages in the poems.

If Eliot had wanted to let the world know his feelings had changed, he had a platform ready to

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hand in the *Criterion*, the periodical he had edited since 1922. Instead, he maintained a discreet reserve, with one significant exception. In July 1936, the *Criterion* carried a hostile review of *The Yellow Spot*, a survey of the persecution of German Jews. The work itself was thorough and well-documented: much of the sickening detail it contained was drawn from the Nazis' own publications. But the *Criterion* review, which was unsigned, was a little horror: in Julius's words, it "crawls with impatient distaste, willfully refusing to do its subject justice." Christopher Ricks, whose *T.S. Eliot and Prejudice* (1988) is far and away the most subtle and closely-reasoned attempt to defend him where he is defensible, sums it up in a word as "shameful."

Like previous commentators, Julius was at first inclined to believe that the anonymous reviewer was Eliot himself. Recently, however, Valerie Eliot has revealed that according to the financial files of the *Criterion*, the piece was the work of a minor contributor to the magazine, Montgomery Belgion. That Eliot did not write it affords a certain relief. But as editor—and the magazine was very much his bailiwick—he must still bear responsibility for publishing it.

There is one aspect of the story which Julius ignores: the extent to which Eliot's attitudes put him at odds with his own Church. The point seems to me all the more worth stressing in the light of some of the responses Julius's book has received. In a lengthy review in the *New Republic* (July 15), for example, the critic James Wood, while far from denying that Eliot was an anti-Semite, argues that the central fact about him—the central fact from the late 1920's, at least—was his religion. Once he had become a believing Christian, anything he wrote or failed to write about the Jews, like everything else he wrote or failed to write, was (according to Wood) shaped by his belief that "whatever was outside the Christian Church was heretical and, literally, deadly."

Eliot was received into the Church of England in 1928. Five years later, that church found itself facing the challenge of fascism and the Nazi persecution of the Jews. The record of its response, which has been studied by the historian Andrew Chandler,* is inevitably rather complicated. There was a good deal of fumbling and uncertainty; some Church leaders were unduly cautious, or not very good at getting their point across. But there can be no question that most of them were appalled by what they learned. The Archbishop of Canterbury denounced Nazi oppression in the House of Lords and in the columns of the *Times*; the church's general assembly passed a celebrated motion of condemnation; there were many other protests and attempts to influence public opinion. Indeed, one of the most vigorous champions of the persecuted German Jews was Hensley Henson, the Bishop of Durham, who wrote a preface to *The Yellow Spot* (to be duly rewarded in Belgion's review by a sneer about the book's appearing "with a cathedratic blessing").

Against this background, Eliot stands out as an extremist, almost an eccentric. A few Anglicans no doubt agreed with him, but they were as out of tune as he was with the predominant traditions and convictions of the English church. I do not know whether Bishop Henson ever saw the review of *The Yellow Spot*; if he did, I feel sure he would have found it profoundly un-Christian.

Julius's final chapter is a scrupulous examination of the occasions in Eliot's later years when he was either asked to explain his earlier attitudes or felt moved to revise them. On the whole it makes for dispiriting reading. A certain mellowing can be discerned, and there are some conciliatory gestures, but the chief impression is one of embarrassment. Sometimes you even wonder whether Eliot understood quite what was at stake, though his defensiveness suggests that he probably did. One section of the final chapter is entitled "Denials and Evasions," another "Insensitivities." Julius refuses to allow us the satisfaction of a happy ending.

THE RECEPTION accorded *T.S. Eliot, Anti-Semitism, and Literary Form* would make a small study in itself. A number of responses have been understandably pained or hostile, although none of the rejoinders I have seen has succeeded in tackling the issues head-on. But Julius has also been widely praised, and sometimes by writers with their own axes to grind. In Britain, the left-wing poet and critic Tom Paulin used the book to launch a general campaign against Eliot, and the poet James Fenton took up the cry with a much-publicized lecture at Oxford in which he asked why we should not describe Eliot as a "scoundrel." A writer in the *Guardian* newspaper expressed his pleasure at seeing Eliot get "a real duffing-up."

* "The Church of England and the Jews of Germany, 1933-1937," *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*, 1993.

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Reactions of this kind are to be expected in 1996, and there is almost certainly more to come: the lesser brigades of political correctness are lying in wait. It is hard not to feel exasperated by them, especially when one knows how one-sided the rules are: it must be a long time since anyone on the *Guardian* recommended a real duffing-up of Bertolt Brecht. Still, two wrongs do not make a right, and the Eliot problem remains.

Is it, in the end, as large a problem as Julius makes out? For all his determination to maintain a balance, there are a number of points at which he is led to overstate his case. When he writes, for example, that "Eliot had the imagination of an anti-Semite to the highest degree," I do not altogether demur; but I think it important to add that it was a form of imagination which he did not exercise very often, and that he by no means possessed it to the most prolonged degree, or to the most obsessive. Again, when Julius proceeds to argue, in the same passage, that "anti-Semitism did not disfigure Eliot's work, it animated it," I know what he means, but I still feel moved to ask, how much of it did it animate, and to what extent? Here, as at other places in the book, Julius's readers could easily be left with the impression that anti-Semitism played a more central—more animating—role in Eliot's work than it did.

ELIOT HAD many other preoccupations, and displayed many other forms of imagination. After prolonged exposure to the worst side of him, it is worth standing back for a moment to remind ourselves that "Prufrock" initiated a revolution in sensibility as great as any in English poetry since the era of the Romantics, and that *The Waste Land* and *Four Quartets* come as close to being undisputed classics as the 20th century can show. As for his critical essays, especially on 17th-century poetry, they effectively redrew the map of literary history. And none of this work contains a single expression of anti-Semitic sentiment. If it were all we knew of him, the question would never arise.

For a poet for whom anti-Semitism really was a central concern, one has only to turn to Ezra Pound—who, incidentally, was dissatisfied even with *After Strange Gods*: he wrote of it that "Eliot had not come through uncontaminated by the Jewish poison." Reading Julius, I was reminded more than once, and mainly by way of contrast, of Robert Casillo's admirable study of Pound's fascism and anti-Semitism, *The Genealogy of Demons* (1988). There seems almost no limit to the ghastly stuff Casillo dredges up. Julius, on the other hand, is forced to work his relevant texts hard. He makes them yield a great deal, but you feel he needs more of them.

None of this renders his book any the less valuable. Future writers on Eliot, if they are to do their job properly, will have to absorb its lessons; future readers will be grateful that it illumines a murky but important area with so much skill. It is just that its subject-matter should not be allowed to overshadow everything else Eliot wrote.

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How the Gay-Rights Movement Won

Norman Podhoretz

A FEW YEARS ago I listened in amazement as a friend of mine, a prominent social critic, told a group of his fellow conservatives who had gathered to talk about the gay-rights movement that "we're turning this thing around." Normally my friend was so astute an observer of the twists and turns in public opinion on the major issues of the day that I found it hard to understand how he could have gone so far wrong in judging the way this one was moving. Or was it perhaps I who had gone completely off the rails in believing that the great campaign to legitimize homosexuality and to establish it as a fully acceptable "alternative lifestyle" was succeeding beyond even its own wildest expectations? Was he crazy, or was I?

In the ensuing discussion, I based my argument on what seemed to me the almost complete triumph of the gay-rights agenda and its sustaining attitudes in all the institutions of the culture, from the universities and the arts to the media of information and entertainment and even to an incredible extent (considering that the Bible unequivocally prohibits homosexuality as an "abomination") in the churches. He then countered this sketch of the culture with evidence drawn from the polity. He pointed to the retreat that public opinion had forced upon President Clinton when he proposed to end all restrictions on gays in the military, and he also cited a number of recent local referenda in which homosexuals had been denied the protected status they sought through inclusion in antidiscrimination laws.

Those referenda would later be struck down by the courts—but that would neither have surprised my friend nor cut any ice with him. Thanks to their umbilical connection to the universities through the law schools, as well as their relative insulation from the pressures of majority sentiment, the courts in his scheme of things (and in mine, for that matter) were less a part of the polity than a part of the culture; and the culture, he readily stipulated, was for the time being a lost cause from the conservative point of view.

Neither of us, then, was crazy; we just had our eyes on different realities; and the debate was temporarily resolved by a reciprocal concession on my part that he was probably as right about the polity as he acknowledged I was about the culture. This, however, still left open the question of which realm would ultimately prove decisive, and on that question we continued to disagree. His bet was that in an increasingly conservative political climate, the culture would sooner or later either wind up following the election returns where homosexuality was concerned, just

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as it was already doing on other issues like the family, welfare, and crime; or, short of that, it would prove powerless to resist the pressures of majority sentiment. My guess was that in this area, if not necessarily in all others, the election returns would in the end largely be determined by the culture.

Not having checked back lately, I cannot say whether or not my friend has changed his mind about the balance of forces on this particular front of the ongoing war between the culture and the polity. But assuming that he still holds the same view, he could now justify himself by pointing to the overwhelming congressional vote cast this past September in favor of the Defense of Marriage Act (342-67 in the House and 85-14 in the Senate) and the even more powerful evidence of President Clinton's willingness to sign it. Designed mainly to enable individual state legislatures to outlaw same-sex marriages even if a court in another state sanctions such unions, this bill's passage represented a clear defeat of the culture by the polity. After all, gay marriage was a favorite cause with the institutions of the culture, and yet in this instance they were trumped by majority sentiment expressing itself through the democratically elected institutions of the polity.

My friend could also cite the Senate's rejection, on the very same day, of a bill that would have banned discrimination against homosexuals in the workplace. Even though the vote in this case was as close (50-49) as the other was lopsided, it still amounted to a defeat of the gay-rights movement within the political realm—and on an objective that was, if anything, even more enthusiastically endorsed by the culture than same-sex marriage.

Not having changed my mind either, I can argue that these victories over the gay-rights movement were less impressive than they seemed. Yes, the Defense of Marriage Act passed overwhelmingly, but it was a remarkably timid bill. As the syndicated columnist Maggie Gallagher observes:

> It does not ban gay marriage. It doesn't even require that states that adopt gay marriage do so through democratic means. To the citizens of Hawaii, where a handful of lawyers appear poised to impose gay marriage on the majority, the federal government turns its back. . . .

Furthermore, this bill flies in the face of what the *New York Times* describes as "an accelerating trend among companies and local governments to extend health benefits to employees' gay partners"—that is, to treat them as though they were legally married couples. Thus far, such policies have been adopted by 36 cities, 12 counties, and 4 states. They have also been instituted voluntarily by 313 companies, the largest of which, IBM, ironically extends spousal benefits *only* to cohabiting homosexual couples, and refuses to accord the same privileges to heterosexual couples living together without benefit of clergy. It is also worth noting that at least two of these companies were founded and until quite recently headed by men closely identified with conservative causes—Coors and Disney. (The latter, following through on the logic of its stand on spousal benefits, also permits special Gay Days at Disney World which are promoted by their sponsors with posters depicting Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck as a hand-holding couple.)

As for the antidiscrimination bill, in falling short by only one vote, it presages the almost inevitable addition, and soon, of homosexuals to the already rather long list of minorities in a position to demand not only freedom from discrimination but the kind of preferential treatment euphemistically known as affirmative action. "Strategically," writes the executive director of the Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund, "gay people have found far more success in the courts than in Congress," but the closeness of the vote in the Senate on the antidiscrimination bill indicates that Congress is now starting to catch up.

There are other bits of evidence suggesting even more strongly that the polity is now following the culture on the question of homosexuality. Consider, to begin with, the following item, which was published in the *New York Times* only a day after the two votes in the Senate:

> Not so long ago, an openly gay candidate running for office in the Bible Belt or any rural area could expect to end up as political road kill. Times may be changing. In Oklahoma, the Democrats have nominated Paul Barby . . . to face Frank D. Lucas, the incumbent in the Sixth Congressional District. Just before Mr. Barby announced his candidacy, he told Democrats by letter that he is a homosexual. The district is largely rural, taking up the western half of the state,

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> and is full of socially conservative Southern Baptists. But, to the surprise of many of Mr. Barby's supporters, no one has made an issue of his sexual orientation. And Mr. Lucas says he will not make any fuss over it.

This was not liberal Massachusetts, where Congressman Barney Frank managed to win reelection even after the discovery that his Washington residence had been used as a base of operations by a gay prostitute, and where his colleague, Congressman Gerry Studds, also survived politically even after it was revealed that he had been involved sexually with a young boy working as a Senate page. This was Oklahoma, a state where, as the *Times* reminds us, David L. Boren, running for the Senate in 1978, "felt compelled to swear on a Bible that he was heterosexual" after rumors to the contrary had been brought up by his opponent.

Nor was the new trend confined to Democrats. A day or two after the story about Paul Barby was published in the *Times*, a leading Republican political consultant in New York was "outed," and when interviewed by a *New York Post* reporter, nonchalantly confirmed the report with the comment: "Please, I don't want to be rude, but let me stifle a yawn." In a similar vein, one of his clients, Governor George Pataki, remarked: "Somebody must be getting desperate if they think this is a story." And another client, Senator Alfonse D'Amato, asked: "Are we for real here? Please."

A dismissive response like this was perhaps to be expected in New York, even among conservative Republicans. But as the *Times* also informed us, everything's up to date in Arizona, too. In that traditionally conservative stronghold,

> there has been no great talk-radio clamor or stump-speech vitriol directed at a six-term Congressman, Jim Kolbe, since he acknowledged a few weeks ago that he is homosexual. Mr. Kolbe, a Republican, . . . now has a wide lead in general-election polls . . . and his decision spurred another Arizona officeholder, Neil Giuliano, the Republican Mayor of Tempe, to announce late last month that he too is gay.

Then there is Congressman Steve Gunderson, who was reelected (albeit with some difficulty) by the people of his rural Wisconsin district even after being outed as a homosexual. Not only that, but Newt Gingrich—whose reputation for homophobia yields nothing to Pat Robertson's or Pat Buchanan's—emphatically turned down Gunderson's offer to resign from the Republican leadership in the House ("I would never ask you to resign over that nonsense"), and later topped things off by putting him in charge of a task force to reform the schools of Washington, D.C. Now Gingrich has also given a blurb to *House and Home*, the treacly book Gunderson has written with his lover, Rob Morris, about "the political and personal journey of a gay Republican Congressman and the man with whom he created a family."[1]

WHAT ALL these examples demonstrate is that little by little, but with increasing momentum, the approving attitude of the culture toward homosexuality is overcoming the resistance of majority sentiment as reflected in the polity. To anyone who remembers how different it used to be, this is bound to seem a truly astonishing development. For not so long ago, and even within the most advanced sectors of the culture, it was still taken pretty much for granted that homosexuality was, quite simply, a perversion.

Certainly this was true of the sector I knew best, the literary world. In that world, male homosexuals (but not, so far as one could tell, lesbians) were very prominent, and yet they mostly seemed to share in the almost universally held assumption that there was something wrong with homosexuality.

To be sure, very few literary people, whether straight or gay, thought that it was *morally* wrong (although some undoubtedly did, in spite of themselves); they saw it, rather, as the symptom of an illness, the product of a neurotic disorder which could in certain cases be cured by psychoanalysis but which in most others was probably beyond the reach of treatment. I cannot recall any speculation such as has become common lately about a "gay gene," but there was a kind of commonsense recognition that some homosexuals were just born that way, and that little or nothing could be done about it. They might, for one reason or another, decide to get married and have children, but their true sexual desires would remain focused on men, and it was with men that they would commit adultery if (or more likely when) they did. We were all familiar with such cases, especially among our friends and counterparts in England. Many of them had

[1] Dutton, 327 pp., $24.95.

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been initiated into homosexuality in boarding school and they then, as it were, paid their debt to society by marrying and raising families while continuing to depend for sexual satisfaction on other men, usually the younger and more lower-class the better.

To say, however, that homosexuality was generally regarded as a perversion is to tell only one part of the story. The other part had to do with the striking fact that so many artists past and present—poets, novelists, composers, painters, and sculptors, as well as actors and dancers and instrumentalists and impresarios—were homosexual. Even homosexuals who were not themselves important artists tended to be great appreciators of art. They also tended to be amusing companions, much given to gossip as catty as it was witty and only slightly spoiled by the hearer's strong suspicion that he himself would become its object as soon as he was out of earshot.

It was, then, a complicated attitude: the recognition that homosexuality bred a special talent for what, in that world, was the most highly valued of all human activities coexisted with the belief that it was a perversion. Another complication was that even many of the homosexuals who went along with this latter view of their own erotic appetites simultaneously thought, or professed to think, that all men shared in those appetites if they but knew it. "Try it, you'll like it," they would flirtatiously say in a camp adaptation of a popular advertising slogan of the day. Along the same lines, they would attribute what would later be called homophobia (a word that did not then exist) to "HP" (homosexual panic) or "HD" (homosexual dread)—that is, a defense against the temptation to engage in homosexual activity.

Nowadays the radicals within the gay community, and the professors who teach Gay and Lesbian Studies in the universities, like to call themselves "queer." Whatever this may inadvertently reveal, it is *intended* as a piece of in-your-face bravado, a declaration that homosexuals are rebels against a repressive society, not an admission that homosexuality is a perversion. Two recent cases in point are the books *Midlife Queer* by Martin Duberman and *The Material Queer*, edited by Donald Morton. There is also *Beyond Queer*, an anthology edited by Bruce Bawer whose purpose is to challenge the "Gay Left Orthodoxy" represented by the term queer. (Bawer also helped Gunderson and Morris write their book.) Indeed, no homosexual today would be caught dead agreeing that homosexuality is a perversion, or even an illness, and almost the only heterosexuals with the nerve openly to endorse such a retrograde view are conservative Christians.

What set the process in motion through which homosexuality would eventually be legitimated in every sense was its transformation from a private condition into a political movement. The first effort to accomplish this was made in the early 1950's with the founding of the Mattachine Society by a radical leftist named Harry Hay. Will Roscoe, the editor of *Radically Gay*, a collection of Hay's papers,[2] credits him with originating the idea that "Lesbians and gay men differ from heterosexuals much as African-Americans, Latinos, Japanese-Americans, and other ethnic groups differ from Euro-Americans," and that homosexuals could and should overcome their self-hatred and their shame and take pride in their "lovely sexuality." Around the same time, the same idea was expressed by Donald Webster Cory in *The Homosexual in America*:

> We who are homosexual are a minority, not only numerically, but also as a result of a caste-like status in society. . . . Our minority status is similar, in a variety of respects, to that of national, religious, and other ethnic groups: in the denial of civil liberties; in the legal, extra-legal, and quasi-legal discrimination; in the assignment of an inferior social position; in the exclusion from the mainstream of life and culture.

It would be impossible to exaggerate the importance of this idea to the changes that lay ahead, but it turned out to be premature. In those days, very few people, whether gay or straight, were prepared to see homosexuality as comparable to race or ethnicity, or as something in which to take pride, and so the Mattachine Society soon faded away.

It was only in the late 60's that its animating idea really took hold among homosexuals, and by that time the activists among them could draw on the experience of the various protest movements of the decade just past. Borrowing tactics from the New Left and the counterculture that were, to quote Francis Mark Mondimore in *A Natural History of Homosexuality*,[3] "aggressive and confrontational," they began by staging boisterous demonstrations against obvious tar-

[2] Beacon Press, 366 pp., $27.50.

[3] Johns Hopkins University Press, 275 pp., $35.00.

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gets like police harassment. But then, Mondimore writes:

> Emboldened by their successes in opposing police harassment, gay-liberation activists turned their attention to another historical opponent: the psychiatric profession. In 1970, gay activists stormed the annual meeting of the American Psychiatric Association, confronted psychoanalyst Irving Bieber during a panel discussion on homosexuality, and called him a "motherfucker" in front of his shocked colleagues.

To this the APA responded exactly as the universities had done earlier when they were attacked by student activists: it capitulated. Rather than expressing outrage, "sympathetic psychiatrists" immediately joined the gay liberationists in demanding that the APA's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* be revised to eliminate homosexuality from the list of mental disorders on which it had long been included. Within three years, they got their wish, and in short order the American Psychological Association and the National Association of Social Workers followed suit.

In altering its long-held view of homosexuality as a mental disorder, of course, the APA claimed that it was bowing to the weight of scientific evidence. But such "evidence" had been available for a long time, and it was only when political pressure was exerted that the APA suddenly found it persuasive. Moreover, much of it was drawn from the data compiled by Alfred Kinsey, and yet when his estimate of the incidence of male homosexuality (10 percent) would later be exposed as wildly overblown by a much more rigorous study conducted by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago (which arrived at a figure of 2.6 percent), and by the even more definitive *Sex in America* (2.8 percent), the APA would make no move to reverse itself again. Clearly it was politics, not science, that drove homosexuality off the association's list of mental disorders, and it is politics, not science, that keeps it off.

WITH HOMOSEXUALITY officially certified as a perfectly healthy form of sexual expression, the next step was to get it defined as inborn. Gone were the days when any homosexual would dare attribute homophobia to HD or HP, with the underlying assumption that anyone was capable of becoming homosexual. According to the new party line, homosexuality was in no degree a matter of choice; it was always and entirely an involuntary condition. As such, it was beyond the reach of moral judgment, for how could a person be judged for acting in accordance with his true nature or, as religiously inclined homosexuals would put it, in accordance with the way God created him? (Congressman Gunderson: "I suddenly heard a strong and compassionate voice speak to me. 'Why are you so unaccepting of the person I made you to be?' the voice asked. 'Why, if it's okay with me, isn't it okay with you?'")

Never mind that the same logic would confer moral legitimation on pedophiles, who also could and did claim that they were made that way and were therefore unable to help themselves. This did not prevent the argument from working in connection with homosexuals, just as it simultaneously served to get homosexuals included in the category of oppressed minority groups by defining their condition as no more a matter of choice than race or ethnicity. Thus, in explaining why he meant to vote against the Defense of Marriage Act, Senator Charles Robb of Virginia could bring the two themes of genetic programming and race neatly together:

> If homosexuality is an inalienable characteristic, which cannot be altered by counseling or willpower, then moral objections to gay marriage do not appear to differ significantly from moral objections to interracial marriages.

This new definition of homosexuality carried yet another advantage—it meant that children were not at risk of being seduced into homosexuality by homosexual teachers or encouraged into it by homosexual propaganda in the schools. On the contrary: children born straight would be taught tolerance of their naturally homosexual classmates who, instead of being forced as in the benighted past to struggle against their true sexual nature, would learn to accept and live happily with it.

AS THE psychiatrists were coerced into lending the authority of "science" to the claim that homosexuality was as natural and healthy as heterosexuality, so the biologists and the geneticists now came under pressure to provide scientific proof that homosexuals were all born and not made. Biology and genetics being much harder sciences than psychiatry, a quick and decisive victory on this front such as had been achieved over the APA could not be expected.

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Besides, it was considered virtually criminal to bring up genes in the case of intelligence—anyone who needed reminding on that score would soon get it in the form of the assault on Charles Murray and Richard J. Herrnstein for emphasizing the role of inheritance in IQ in their book *The Bell Curve*. So how could the gay-rights movement expect the same idea to be sympathetically received in the case of homosexuality?

The answer, as it turned out, was that in the liberal culture, genetic explanations were considered good or bad not on the basis of their scientific merits, but only on the basis of whether they were deemed to be helpful or harmful to the group in question. No matter how much evidence might be amassed to demonstrate the heritability of intelligence, ways had to be found to discredit that evidence because it was considered bad for blacks. Conversely, however, the scantiest evidence for the existence of a "gay gene" was enthusiastically seized upon because it was thought to be good for homosexuals.

Admittedly, there was also strong resistance to the idea of a gay gene. Plenty of scientists remained unpersuaded by the evidence and said so. Nor did every supporter of the gay-rights movement agree that the discovery of a gay gene would be good for homosexuals. Some worried that it might lead to the aborting of fetuses carrying the gene, or that it could create a demand for genetic surgery to eliminate it in adults. Nevertheless, as can be seen from the breathless account given by Chandler Burr in *A Separate Creation: The Search for the Biological Origins of Sexual Orientation*,[4] the general disposition was to welcome this research as a hopeful development, and to look forward to the day when the hard sciences would lend their imprimatur to the new party line.

In the meantime, personal testimony was summoned to carry the main burden of persuading the world that homosexuals were born and not made. As more and more homosexuals propelled or found themselves pushed out of the fabled closet in which so many had once concealed their "orientation," novel after novel, play after play, and memoir after memoir poured from the presses, and with few exceptions the authors of these confessionals proclaimed that they had been attracted to other men from as far back as they could remember. Many told harrowing stories of the shame they had felt and the consequent anguish they had gone through in fighting against their own sexual appetites. Many had contemplated suicide (and others they knew had actually committed it). Many had tried various forms of therapy in the hope of being cured. Many had married and fathered children. All in vain. The only hope, and the only salvation, lay in the recognition that there was nothing whatsoever wrong with homosexuality, or with the uninhibited pursuit of happiness through sex with other men.[5]

Before 1980, in the decade or so immediately preceding the outbreak of AIDS, much of this literature was defiant in tone and suffused by the radical spirit of the liberationist 60's. It celebrated "the joys of gay sex" and the promiscuity almost invariably associated with it as superior to the pale and timid pleasures available to the monogamous middle-class couple. And it did this in spite of the fact that even before AIDS had made its appearance, lesser venereal diseases were already spreading at a very rapid rate among homosexuals as a result of promiscuous anal and oral intercourse.

A grim account was given by Randy Shilts, the gay journalist who in *And the Band Played On* produced the most authoritative early book on the AIDS epidemic (and who would later die of the disease himself). On the eve of its outbreak, Shilts wrote, gay men

> were being washed by tide after tide of increasingly serious infections. First it was syphilis and gonorrhea. Gay men made up about 80 percent of the 70,000 annual patients to [San Francisco's] VD clinics. Easy treatment had imbued them with such a cav-

[4] Hyperion, 354 pp., $24.95.

[5] As will already have been evident, I have been talking all along only about male homosexuality. Lesbianism is now invariably linked with male homosexuality in public discourse, but in my opinion it demands to be treated as a separate phenomenon. Since I cannot do that here, I will restrict myself to observing that lesbianism has achieved perhaps an even greater degree of acceptance than male homosexuality. One sign is the swelling volume of academic studies and popular reports trying to demonstrate that children raised by lesbian couples turn out as well as, or even better than, children in normal families. Recently, in the space of a few short weeks, we had at least one book (*In the Name of the Family* by Judith Stacey), a long article in *U.S. News & World Report*, and a network television drama "based on a true story" ("She's fallen in love with another woman. Does that give her mother the right to take her child away?") trying to sell us this highly implausible thesis. Another sign is the appearance of a satirical book by Helen Eisenbach entitled *Lesbianism Made Easy* ("Some people are born lesbians, some achieve lesbianism, and some have lesbianism thrust upon them."); it seems doubtful that a book taking this tone about male homosexuality would be published today.

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alier attitude toward venereal diseases that many gay men saved their waiting-line numbers, like little tokens of desirability, and the clinic was considered an easy place to pick up both a shot and a date.

None of this deterred a gay paper from running an article in praise of "rimming" (oral-anal sex) as a "revolutionary act." Along the same lines, Edmund White, the co-author of *The Joy of Gay Sex*, even proposed at a public meeting that "gay men should wear their sexually transmitted diseases like red badges of courage in a war against a sex-negative society." A young homosexual named Michael Callen, who was present at that meeting, who had already had *3,000* sexual partners, and who (like White himself) would eventually come down with AIDS, remembered thinking: "Every time I get the clap I'm striking a blow for the sexual revolution."

Today, by sharp contrast, we have a flood of articles and books whose purpose is to show that homosexuals like White are untypical and that they do not really speak for the gay community. These writers tell us that homosexuality is no more significant than (to cite a much-invoked image) left-handedness; that most homosexuals are ordinary, decent people who differ from heterosexuals only in their manner of expressing love; and that they aspire to nothing more than ordinary decent middle-class lives. Far from being sexual revolutionaries ideologically committed to promiscuity, they are great believers in "family values" and would settle down and enter into loving long-term monogamous relationships if society would but let them. Indeed, we are now told, the radicalism preached and the promiscuity practiced by self-described "queer" theorists and activists are themselves products of social oppression, and upon social acceptance will eventually disappear.[6]

In a recent article in *New York* magazine, Daniel Mendelsohn laments the trend exemplified by this literature as the "heterosexualization of gay culture." Gay books and plays, he complains, "are less likely to celebrate the initiation into a world of avid sexuality . . . than they are to emphasize the importance of (who knew?) family ties." Even Michelangelo Signorile, who became famous for outing closeted celebrities, has grown tame, Mendelsohn reports: "Recent columns [by Signorile] include thirtysomething meditations on the paradoxes of monogamy ('Sex and the Not-So-Single Guy') and the difficulties of reconciling a gay lifestyle with traditional family life (inevitably, 'Homo for the Holidays')." And, casting an interesting light on the issue of how much choice is involved in homosexuality, Mendelsohn asks: "If you look straight, act straight, and think straight, why bother being gay?"

But even Mendelsohn acknowledges the political benefits that have come from the new party line, which originally emerged in response to the appearance of AIDS. Fearing, reasonably enough, that this horrendous disease—intimately tied as it was to promiscuous anal intercourse and other joys of gay sex—would be a political disaster, gay activists advised (in the words of one handbook) that "In any campaign to win over the public, gays must be portrayed as victims. . . . Persons featured in the media campaign should be indistinguishable from the straights we'd like to reach." These tactics have succeeded brilliantly. Instead of turning homosexuals once again into pariahs, AIDS confirmed and reconfirmed their status as victims, thereby enhancing their claim to be considered an oppressed minority while also guaranteeing them additional sympathy and increasing their political clout.

Nothing seemed to interfere with the progress of this astonishing development. At first it chugged along steadily under the aegis of the dogma (bolstered by the politically manipulated statistics of public-health agencies and the propaganda of the AIDS establishment) that heterosexuals were just as much at risk as homosexuals. But then it flourished equally well when, after a while, most people, just by looking around them, quietly came to the conclusion that insofar as AIDS was a sexually transmitted disease (though it could also be transmitted through the shared needles of drug addicts or through blood transfusions, and though the situation might for some reason be different in Africa or India), in America it was overwhelmingly confined to homosexuals.

Nor did the AIDS epidemic lead to a condemnation of the sexual acts that were a prime cause

[6] In the past few months alone, we have had, in addition to those already mentioned above, the following books devoted to making these points (and this is by no means a complete list): *Farm Boys: Lives of Gay Men from the Rural Midwest* by Will Fellows; *A Boy Named Phyllis: A Suburban Memoir* by Frank DeCaro; *Gay Olympian: The Life and Death of Dr. Tom Waddell* by Tom Waddell and Dick Schaap; *Becoming Gay: The Journey to Self-Acceptance* by Richard A. Isay, M.D.; and *American Gay* by Stephen O. Murray. Under the heading, "Gay and Lesbian Books for Fall," *Publishers Weekly* (September 30) lists a "selection" of no fewer than 123 new titles.

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of it. On the contrary, these acts were now represented as perfectly proper so long as they were practiced "safely" (i.e., with a condom or a dental dam). And most incredible of all, children in the early grades of primary school were even given lessons in the correct techniques.

Finally, there was the effect of AIDS on the idea that homosexuality was an inborn, involuntary condition. Congressman Gunderson once delivered a passionate little lecture on the subject to Newt Gingrich:

> "Newt," I said, "you've got to understand that . . . [California Congressman William] Dannemeyer and the far Right are just plain wrong when they say that being gay is a choice. You've got to know that I spent years desperately trying to change my orientation. I don't know a single person who would *choose* to go through the hell of being a gay person in a society that despises you."

AIDS also gave a great *a-fortiori* boost to this argument: who would *choose* the risk of dying an early death in so horrible a manner?

So there, more or less, is where we now are. It is a place in which homosexuality is already so widely accepted that not even the knowledge of its connection with AIDS can tarnish or compromise its new reputation as a normal and healthy "orientation." A few holdouts among the psychoanalysts and psychiatrists still insist that it is a neurotic disorder, and most religious conservatives, whether Christian, Jewish, or Muslim, continue to stigmatize it as a perversion. There is, for example, Jeffrey Satinover, a psychiatrist who writes from a religious perspective. In *Homosexuality and the Politics of Truth*,[7] Satinover has produced a powerful polemic maintaining that homosexuality is simultaneously a kind of addiction and a sin. Like other addictions, he says, it is treatable if the addict wishes to free himself of it (which to Satinover is the same thing as saying that, like other sins, it can be successfully overcome if the sinner repents).

But the holdouts are all very much on the defensive, and the moral and intellectual confidence they once enjoyed seems to be oozing out of them as the surrounding culture pounds away at and stigmatizes *their* assumptions and beliefs. Religious opponents of the gay-rights agenda are treated as troglodytes and a menace to liberty; the Supreme Court has found a special "animus" behind an amendment to the Colorado state constitution declining to afford homosexuality the same civil-rights status as race and religion; and gay activists in the APA have been trying to get "homophobia" recognized as a "psychological abnormality." This same group within the APA has also charged that psychiatrists who treat homosexuals wishing to become heterosexuals are "unethical" and guilty of "an abuse or misuse of psychiatry."

The holdouts know full well that the drive to legalize same-sex marriage is mainly aimed at getting the law to make what Andrew Sullivan, one of this campaign's leading proponents, calls "a fundamental statement that our loves are as good as anybody else's." But how long can they resist even this final closing of the gap between the culture and the polity?

In short, I believe even less than I did a few years ago that "we are turning this thing around," and I do not believe that we are likely to do so in the foreseeable future.

Yet for whatever it may be worth—and I fully realize how little it may be worth—I for one will go on withholding my assent from this triumphant march. Though there is nothing I can do to stop or even to slow it down, it will have to proceed on its way without my approval or support. Let me try to explain why.

Having known many homosexuals personally, and having done a good deal of reading on the subject, I do not doubt that some young boys are so driven by the lust for other men, and so erotically repelled by women, that for all practical purposes the only choice they have is between homosexuality and chastity. Nor do I doubt that a biological or genetic factor is at work here. Of course it does not follow from this that homosexuality is healthy; after all, many disabilities, diseases, and self-destructive tendencies are genetically transmitted. Still less does it follow that there is no room for free will, as witness the many people (including those with powerful homosexual inclinations) who have successfully struggled against inborn predispositions.

Yet if I do not doubt that some young boys are in effect doomed from the beginning to a choice between homosexuality and chastity, neither do I doubt that other young boys are what E.L. Pattullo has characterized as "waverers" who are capable of going either way.[8] They can yield to the temptation of homosexuality if they are encouraged or seduced into it—and, *pace* Congressman

[7] Baker Books, 266 pp., $17.99.

[8] "Straight Talk About Gays," Commentary, December 1992.

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Gunderson, in this day and age when feminism has made girls even more formidably intimidating than they have always been to young boys, and especially to young boys of uncertain sexual formation, getting entangled with women can actually seem more frightening even than AIDS. Such boys, however, are no longer helped by the world around them to resist the homosexual temptation and to overcome their fears of a normal life. They are instead being abandoned to the ministrations of a culture that not only legitimizes homosexuality but glorifies and glamorizes it, even to the point of representing those who die of AIDS as martyrs and heroes and even as angels.

I do not regard homosexuals, not even those who fall victim to AIDS, as martyrs and heroes, let alone as angels. Nevertheless my heart goes out to all of them because I believe that—even aside from AIDS—the life they live is not as good as the life available to men who make their beds with women.

The reason is that men tend by nature to be promiscuous, and they only become monogamous when women force them to "settle down" in exchange for the comforts and pleasures of a stable home and the delights and the troubles, the challenges and the anxieties, that together constitute the rich fascination of fathering and raising children. It is because homosexuals have no women to restrain them that they are generally so promiscuous (whereas lesbians, being women, do tend toward monogamy); and because they are so promiscuous they are doomed to an endless series of anonymous and loveless encounters—not to mention the risk of disease and early death.

Homosexuals of a conservative disposition have come to acknowledge this, and they hope to cure it through the legalization of same-sex marriage. Here is an unusually succinct statement of their hope, taken from the jacket of William N. Eskridge, Jr.'s *The Case for Same-Sex Marriage*[9]:

> Whether because of the biology of masculinity or the furtiveness of illegality, gay men have been known for their promiscuous subcultures. Promiscuity has encouraged a cult of youth worship and has contributed to the stereotype of homosexuals as people who lack a serious approach to life. It is time for gay America to mature, and there can be no more effective path to maturity than marriage.

And yet Andrew Sullivan, who in his book *Virtually Normal* makes much the same argument as Eskridge, qualifies it with the proviso that the need for "extramarital outlets" should be recognized by both parties in a same-sex marriage. Why, he asks, should the "varied and complicated lives" of gay men be constrained by a "single, moralistic model"?[10]

It would seem, then (with all individual exceptions noted and acknowledged, here as elsewhere), that it still takes a woman to domesticate a man, not another man. This means that same-sex marriage will in all probability not spell an end to promiscuity and an embrace of fidelity even among those homosexuals who will avail themselves of the right (and by all indications, they are likely to be few in number). After all, as Mark Steyn remarks in a brilliant little piece about Sullivan's book in the *American Spectator*, "a grisly plague has not furthered the cause of homosexual monogamy, so why should a permit from the town clerk?"

ONE MIGHT add that this grisly plague has not even furthered the cause of avoiding death at its hands. There was a period during which the fear of AIDS seems to have reduced the number of partners among homosexuals from the formerly not uncommon hundreds or even thousands per year—yes, hundreds or even thousands—to an average of eight per year; and during the same period condoms were evidently used in many of these encounters. All this slowed the progress of the epidemic within the gay community. By 1991, however, writes Jesse Green in an article in the *New York Times* Sunday magazine as highly sympathetic to homosexuality as we would expect from anything appearing in that publication, "it was common knowledge that men who had been safe for at least six years were slipping more and more often, and that many men who had never been safe saw no point in starting now." The result is that, if current trends continue, "more than half of the nation's twenty-year-old gay men will contract HIV during their lifetime." And in San Francisco alone, the rate "even among the population of older, white gay men . . . has nearly doubled in just the last six years." (According to a still appalling but less drastic estimate cited by Satinover, *only* "30 percent of all twenty-year-old ho-

[9] Free Press, 296 pp., $25.00.

[10] For a discussion of Sullivan's book, see James Q. Wilson, "Against Homosexual Marriage," COMMENTARY, March 1996.

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mosexual males will be HIV positive or dead of AIDS by the time they are thirty.")

When Green tells us that homosexuals are "returning to the unsafe practices of the past," he means not only that they are discarding condoms but that (contrary to the new anti-"queer" party line) they are reverting to a life of unrestrained promiscuity. As in the early days of the epidemic, the subject of promiscuity is once more becoming "taboo," and (again contrary to the new party line) anyone who raises it, whether straight or gay, is accused of homophobia. "Why," asks Green, contemplating this bewildering situation, "are gay men—ordinary gay men, who appear to function normally and enjoy the pleasures of life—systematically killing themselves?"

He comes up with no definitive answer. But surely the answer lies in the very fact that so many homosexuals (including Andrew Sullivan himself, as we learned when he announced upon resigning from the editorship of the *New Republic* that he had contracted the AIDS virus) are willing to court death rather than give up being promiscuous. Surely this fact powerfully suggests that promiscuity is an intrinsic and all but inescapable component of male homosexuality. And surely the same fact also gives the lie to the idea that homosexual promiscuity is the product of social and legal oppression, since the near-disappearance of such oppression seems only to have made matters worse.

George Orwell said that we live in a time when the obvious needs constantly to be restated, and so, to restate what was once self-evident to everyone, including most homosexuals themselves: men using one another as women constitutes a perversion. To my unreconstructed mind, this is as true as ever; and so far as I am concerned, it would still be true even if gay sex no longer entailed the danger of infection and even if everything about it were legalized by all 50 states and ratified by all nine Justices of the Supreme Court.

If that should ever happen, and if I am still around when it does, I hope I will still have the strength to hold on to my own sense of the fundamental realities of life against the terrible distortions that have been introduced into the general understanding of those realities by the gay-rights movement and its supporters. For it is this that is mainly at stake here, and it is this that explains why the issue of homosexuality is of such great moment not just to the proportionately small number of practicing homosexuals, but to all the rest of us as well.

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The Anti-Defense League

Joshua Muravchik & Lawrence F. Kaplan

How much should America spend on defense? According to the editorial pages of our most respected newspapers, well-known columnists and opinion-makers, and numerous other sources in the American media, the answer to that question appears to be: much less than whatever we are spending, or thinking of spending.

This reflexive attitude may be one of the most perduring effects of the Vietnam syndrome. For some, indeed, there would seem to be no calumny too coarse to be employed against America's defense efforts or its military establishment. "If you make sure the [Russian] threat does not diminish, you can rationalize a $264.7 billion defense authorization," wrote Mary McGrory of the *Washington Post* last year, caustically insinuating that our elected representatives were so bent on appropriating money for the military that they would deliberately help to keep Russian nuclear weapons in existence, and thus intentionally compromise American security. And even McGrory was outdone by her *Post* colleague Colman McCarthy, who seized upon the controversy stirred by Daniel Jonah Goldhagen's recent book about the Nazi genocide to write a column about alleged similarities "between Germany's military machine 60 years ago and America's today."

Such vituperativeness tends to be the exception rather than the norm. Nevertheless, a consensus appears to have emerged which has two main tenets: not only are we spending much more than is necessary on defense, we are doing so at the expense of our domestic programs, which are being bled dry in an era of budget-balancing.

Last year, for example, the *New York Times* accused Republicans in Congress of "blithely" placing defense spending "off-limits from cuts," even though the defense budget was already "inflated far beyond the country's security needs" and we were facing (as the *Times* put it on another occasion) an "abyss of deep cuts in domestic programs." More recently, the *Times* again complained of the "extravagant" and "unnecessary" amount provided for defense by the 1997 budget resolution, with every added dollar forcing "compensating cuts in already painfully reduced domestic programs." "Such fiscal irresponsibility," chorused the *Atlanta Journal*, is "appalling," while the *Washington Post* found it deeply ironic that the defense budget should be swelling right in the middle of a supposed bipartisan "effort to balance the budget by 2002."

What is going on here? Before examining these claims, we would do well to cast a glance backward. For this is hardly the first time we have

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heard complaints about inflated defense budgets. During the 1970's, it was a veritable leitmotif of the prestige press. Here, for example, is the *New York Times* almost 25 years ago, in October 1972: "America's defense budget is exploding, becoming in itself a threat to the security and well-being of the nation." According to the *Times*, the administration of then-President Richard Nixon, having "grievously misjudged America's security needs" for the rest of the decade, was suffering from a "preoccupation with military might."

But the *Times* was wrong. From the height of American involvement in Vietnam in 1968, U.S. defense spending in real terms *fell* every fiscal year through 1977. Measured in constant 1987 dollars, spending plummeted over 40 percent in those years, from $296 billion to $177 billion.* By the time the freefall ended, military spending was at a level some 20 percent below what it had been before we entered Vietnam.

None of this, however, seems to have made the slightest impression on the editors of our nation's serious dailies. Spending had already fallen by nearly a third at the time of the editorial cited above, yet in the next fiscal year the *Times* was at it again: although "America's war in Southeast Asia" might be coming to an end, the editors wrote in October 1973, "the old habits of the cold war, of blank checks for a military establishment which thrives on a momentum of its own, seem still to overpower all efforts to reorder national priorities." A year later, after still a further drop, the *Times* announced in bold print a "Record Pentagon Budget." The *Washington Post* agreed: it was the "highest in history."

Finally, in fiscal 1977, when the nine-year build-down had reached its nadir, the *Times* could be found despairing over how hard it would be "to reduce . . . [even] the rate of growth," much less the level, of military spending, while in the *Washington Post* the columnist Clayton Fritchey lamented:

> The more the United States is at peace, the more it spends for war. The Pentagon budget today, at a time when America is not at war or even threatened with one, is vastly greater than it was at the height of the Vietnam conflict.

In the same period, the *Post* "investigative" columnist Jack Anderson revealed that "billions of dollars [were] being tossed around" in the Pentagon "like confetti at a New Year's party," and the cartoonist Herblock portrayed a grotesquely obese general grinning broadly at the latest defense budget as emaciated widows and orphans peeked over his shoulder in dismay.

THE TINY kernel of veracity in all this is the fact that inflation, which reached double-digit levels in the 1970's, was indeed causing each year's federal budget to exceed the previous year's, and in virtually every category of expenditure. But that is why meaningful year-to-year comparisons can only be made in real or constant dollars. This was a distinction routinely overlooked in reports on defense spending, although it was rarely omitted from analyses of domestic spending—where, to the contrary, nominal increases in federal outlays were often described as cuts if they amounted to less than the increment caused by inflation.

And this brings us to the other principal myth of the period, itself encapsulated in the Herblock cartoon. Not only was defense spending supposedly on the rise, but funding for domestic programs was said to be in a corresponding decline. To the *Times* in 1973, President Nixon was "ruthless on social programs"; three years later, with Gerald Ford in the White House, the paper contrasted the President's "ready acceptance of the Pentagon's shopping list and overblown manpower costs" with "his hard-as-nails approach to social programs." And once more the *Washington Post* concurred: "There is an unhappy symbolism to this budget: defense spending rises while the social programs are cut."

But again this misrepresented the facts. During the same nine-year period in which defense spending fell by 40 percent, all categories of domestic spending *rose* sharply in real terms: discretionary spending by 52 percent, non-means-tested entitlements (except Social Security) by 72 percent, Social Security spending by over 100 percent, and means-tested entitlements—the heart of the "social programs" bewailed by the editorialists—by a whopping 160 percent.

In short, a massive shift in "national priorities" was indeed under way in those years, but it was the opposite of what was being claimed in the press. In 1968, defense spending had been slight-

* These figures, including the choice of 1987 dollars as a measure for comparison, and all other budget figures we use are drawn from Table 8.2, "Outlays by Budget Enforcement Act Category in Constant (FY 1987) Dollars: 1962-2002," which appears on page 110 of the Historical Tables published by the office of Management and Budget as an annex to the Budget for Fiscal Year 1997.

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ly larger than the combined categories of domestic spending; in 1977, the domestic total was three times larger than the amount for defense.

Only in the late 1970's, when this reordering of "national priorities" was complete, did Americans awaken to the fact that the one place in the world where military spending had truly been rising was not the United States but the Soviet Union. While we were building down, our adversary had been building up. In belated recognition of this fact, a new consensus began to crystallize in favor of strengthening our defenses, which led in turn to the build-up that started modestly under Jimmy Carter in the final year of his presidency and continued in the Reagan 80's. In this context, media lacerations of the Pentagon subsided somewhat. Now they are back.

HAVING BEEN wrong before, is the press right now? Hardly. If defense spending rose under Reagan, under George Bush it dropped again. Since Bill Clinton took office and made balancing the budget a priority, it has fallen still further—17 percent in the first three years of his presidency. Today, defense spending is lower than it was before the Reagan build-up began. Meanwhile, domestic discretionary spending (the kind that is easiest to cut) has *increased* by 4 percent, as has spending on non-means-tested entitlements; Social Security has increased by 8 percent, and means-tested entitlements by 15 percent. Altogether, discretionary domestic spending is now 11-percent higher than it was before the much-ballyhooed domestic cuts that are also associated with Reagan, and social programs for the needy are now more than double their level at the beginning of the Reagan era.

Nor, contrary to what the press charges, has defense been exempted from plans designed to eliminate the federal deficit by the year 2002. Between now and then, the Clinton budget foresees defense reductions totaling another 9 percent. In the same period, domestic discretionary spending is supposed to be cut by 6 percent, but this will be more than offset by planned increases in entitlements; altogether, domestic spending is scheduled to enjoy 9-percent real growth by 2002 (or 8-percent real growth if Social Security is not included in the calculation).

It is true that Congress has recently added to Clinton's defense proposals, but not by enough to reverse the decline in spending. This, however, has not prevented the press from inventing a new canard, namely, that Congress is insisting on giving the military not only more money than it needs, but more money than it wants—"showering the Defense Department with billions the generals did not request," in the words of the *Times*. The *Washington Post* editorial writer and columnist Jessica Matthews cloaks the same thought in a different image: "more money than the Pentagon thinks it can usefully spend is [being] crammed down its throat." The *San Francisco Chronicle* has likewise discovered "$7 billion more than the Pentagon requested" in the 1996 budget, while the *Atlanta Journal* has attacked the Senate for approving a 1997 budget "that gives the Pentagon $11.1 billion more than the Pentagon asked for."

The fact is that the level of proposed defense spending is never set by "the Pentagon" or "the generals." It is set by the President and his budget office. The uniformed officers and civilian officials of the Defense Department express their opinions and advance their requests in private memos, but their wishes rarely if ever determine the final recommendations. This has been especially true under Clinton, whose first budget included a five-year *cut* of $127 billion from the amount projected by George Bush.

Once the President settles on a budget, Defense Department officials are duty-bound to support it—an obligation that falls with special weight on uniformed officers. Congress may sometimes appropriate sums beyond a President's request, but these are ordinarily for programs which surfaced and sank in the executive-branch budget process. To say of such appropriations that Congress is thrusting funds on the military that the military does not want is utterly false.

IN THE 1970's, opposition to defense spending reflected opposition to the uses for which defense expenditures were intended: namely, American military intervention abroad. Today that is no longer the case—at least, not in so clear-cut a fashion. Many in the media have supported the use of American military power in such places as Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, and even Iraq. Yet the same people often continue to oppose the funding that makes these missions possible.

For example, when the U.S. invaded Haiti, the *Atlanta Journal* applauded the action, praising President Clinton for having "spoken softly and carried a big stick." But only months later the *Journal* was back to berating defense expenditures. "Every gun that is made, every warship launched," the *Journal* editorialized, is "a theft

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from those who hunger . . . those who are cold." Similarly, for three years Anthony Lewis of the *New York Times* wrote powerful columns attacking the Clinton administration for its failure to act militarily in Bosnia; yet one month after the deployment of 20,000 American soldiers there, Lewis was complaining that "military spending has . . . been made sacrosanct."

A similar self-contradiction pervades treatment of the "smart-weapons" issue. According to the latest conventional wisdom, procurement costs for these weapons are one of the main things keeping defense budgets so high—and unnecessarily so, since the weapons are nowhere near so effective as was once thought. Thus, for example, in the view of the *Times*, "Laser-guided bombs, which amounted to only 8 percent of the tonnage dropped during the [Gulf] war, accounted for 84 percent of the munitions cost," and the *Times* went on to complain that in the Gulf war, smart weapons enjoyed only a 40-percent success rate.

As it happens, this "8 percent of tonnage" was responsible for the destruction of almost every strategically important target in Iraq. Moreover, if in the Gulf it took an average of somewhat more than two "smart" bombs to destroy a target, in World War II it took 9,000 "dumb" bombs to destroy a single target, and in Vietnam 176. But even more egregious than the omission of such comparative numbers is the highly selective nature of the *Times*'s disenchantment with "costly and unproven high-tech weapons systems where conventional weapons would do the job." Not two months after the appearance of this editorial, the paper was cheering Bill Clinton's use of precision-guided weapons in southern Iraq, in response to Saddam Hussein's offensive against Erbil. "The choice of targets . . . and the method of attack," the editors enthused, "minimized the danger to American forces and to Iraqi civilians, while making it safer for American planes to enforce a newly expanded no-flight zone." But that, after all, is what costly high-tech weapons systems do—though one would never have known it from reading previous *Times* editorials.

THIS RETURNS us to the question with which we began: how much *should* America spend on defense? Even some critics of American power have come to appreciate that in many corners of the world it is the only thing standing between peace and mayhem; witness how often Bill Clinton—a President dovish by temperament, and little interested in foreign affairs—has felt compelled to employ U.S. military force. Because we rely on professionals who must be paid competitive wages, and because we also rely on technological superiority rather than bulk to assure our advantage, our military is *necessarily* expensive. Our contemporary sensitivity to absorbing casualties, or to inflicting them beyond narrowly intended targets, imposes still greater costs of its own.

Yet in the seven years since the cold war ended, while domestic spending has been rising, defense spending has been falling each year, all told by about one-third. We are not, to be sure, in quite the same position as in the drastic build-down of the 1970's that was so shrouded in misreporting. Then, America's military forces, although still large in number, were hollowed out, starved of funds for training and maintenance. Today, as a result of lessons learned in that earlier period, "readiness" accounts have been spared the brunt of the current build-down, and economies have been achieved instead by reducing the overall size of the military and by drastic cuts in weapons procurement and research. Now that the surplus stock remaining from the Reagan build-up (which compensated for those cuts) has been largely exhausted, the Clinton administration has allowed that we must "recapitalize" our military. Its budgets for the next years, however, leave little room for this, nor—crucially—do they provide for adequate investment in the research that will assure our supremacy when new threats emerge. If today's reductions continue, we will surely be in trouble.

Exactly how much we ought to spend is a question concerning which there is ample room for debate and disagreement. But the cause of rational discussion has hardly been furthered by a systematic bias in the media which, for at least the second time in two decades, has given the American people a very distorted picture of our military effort. One only hopes that Americans will not once again be led to think themselves omnipotent, only to awaken to find themselves vulnerable and constrained.

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Why Solzhenitsyn Will Not Go Away

Joseph Epstein

For the least fair, but most penetrating, analysis of Russian character, one can do no better than to consult Joseph Conrad. The great novelist was a Russophobe. Little love is lost between Poles and Russians generally, but in Conrad's case there was added ground for animus: Russia orphaned him. Owing to the efforts of his father, a literary man-of-all-work, in behalf of Polish freedom, his family was exiled to Siberia in 1863. There, Conrad's mother became consumptive and died, and four years later his father died of the same illness; the novelist-to-be was then eleven.

Conrad's grievance was not quite in the class of an obsession, but it was there, ready for service when needed. Russia, he wrote in "Autocracy and War," a 1905 essay ostensibly about the Russo-Japanese war, was "this pitiful state of a country held by an evil spell," a "bottomless abyss that has swallowed up every hope of mercy, every aspiration toward personal dignity, toward freedom, toward knowledge, every ennobling desire of the heart, every whisper of conscience." Not even revolution could save it: "In whatever form of upheaval Autocratic Russia is to find her end, it can never be a revolution fruitful of moral consequences to mankind. It cannot be anything but an uprising of slaves." Of course that is just what the Russian Revolution of 1917 turned out to be—an uprising of slaves that enslaved the rest of the country, and most of Eastern Europe along with it, for more than 70 years.

For Conrad, Russia was another heart of darkness, this one in a cold climate. In *The Secret Agent*, it is the Russian embassy in London that puts the novel's central figure, Verloc, to the job of blowing up the Greenwich Observatory, which results in the killing of his own poor imbecile brother-in-law and sets in motion the book's nightmare logic. And in *Under Western Eyes*, not his most famous or even his most successful novel but among his most brilliant, the astounding human spectacle that is the Russian character became Conrad's true subject. According to the novel's *faux-naif* narrator, an Englishman teaching English to foreigners in Geneva, Russian simplicity is "a terrible corroding simplicity in which mystic phrases clothe a naive and hopeless cynicism"; in Russia, it is all but impossible to "tell a scoundrel from an exceptionally able man." (One immediately thinks of Mikhail Gorbachev, or of Boris Yeltsin.)

When *Under Western Eyes* was published in 1911, Edward Garnett—husband of Constance Garnett, the great translator from Russian, and a friend and long-time supporter of Conrad—accused him of prejudice. Conrad shot back that Garnett was "so russianized . . . that you don't

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know the truth when you see it—unless it smells of cabbage soup when it at once secures your profound respect." And indeed there are certain Russian characters in *Under Western Eyes*—as it happens, all are women—whose general views Conrad derides and in one instance despises, but whose seriousness, even heroism, he nonetheless freely grants. These characters are all able to live outside themselves, to give themselves to really quite hopeless causes, like the reduction of suffering in a merciless world or the recounting of truth in an undeserving one. Only Russia, one senses in reading this novel, is able to produce people ready to pit themselves against the world's great gray disregard and dark evil—only Russia, out of the depths of its barbarity, is able to produce moral giants.

JOSEPH CONRAD would not only have understood Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn but would, I believe, have been tempted to insert him into a novel. Solzhenitsyn has the scope, the depth, the moral grandeur that stimulated Conrad's imagination to its highest power. He is Conradian, too, in passing what, for Conrad, is the test of authenticity: the willingness to live one's ideas, to sacrifice for them, to make them indivisible with one's very being.

All the great Conradian heroes are isolates, men who have chosen either an occupation or a philosophy that carries with it the condition of apartness. No one could have felt lonelier than Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn during his more than twenty years as an underground writer in the Soviet Union—unless it was Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn during his eighteen years living in a compound outside Cavendish, Vermont, after being expelled from the USSR. In both places, he worked at his self-imposed task of bringing down the Soviet Union—a task whose successful achievement would, I suspect, be beyond the imagining of Joseph Conrad or any other novelist or poet. Even the word "heroic" does not seem quite adequate to describe this accomplishment.

Born in 1918 near Rostov, Solzhenitsyn was arrested and sentenced in 1945 to eight years in a labor camp, presumably for making disparaging jokes about Stalin. After an early release—thanks to the Khrushchev reforms—he was diagnosed with a supposedly terminal cancer, which he conquered. In 1962, during a rare period of cultural thaw, he was allowed to publish, in the Soviet journal *Novy Mir*, his taboo-shattering account of the slave-labor camps, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*. Other works, including the novels *Cancer Ward* (English edition 1968) and *The First Circle* (also 1968), followed—but only in the West. In the West, too, appeared *The Gulag Archipelago*, his monumental three-volume exposé of the Soviet slave-labor system which single-handedly destroyed what remained of Western illusions about the great Communist experiment.

In 1970 Solzhenitsyn was awarded the Nobel Prize, but was refused permission to travel to Stockholm to receive it. Always in a relationship of the greatest strain with Soviet leaders, always a thorn in their sides—"This hooligan Solzhenitsyn is out of control," Leonid Brezhnev once said of him—in 1974 he was finally sent into exile.

Fortunate to have survived the war, the slave-labor camp, cancer, and many skirmishes with the KGB, Solzhenitsyn had come to think of himself as God's vessel. In *Invisible Allies*,* a book written in 1975 but only recently published, and dedicated to the small army of anonymous Russians who helped him during his years as an underground writer, he has this to say about *The Gulag Archipelago*: "It seemed as if it was no longer I who was writing; rather, I was swept along, my hand was being moved by an outside force, and I was only the firing pin attached to a spring." And in *The Oak and the Calf* (English translation 1980), an account of his battles with the Soviet cultural bureaucracy, he writes: "I had learned in my years of imprisonment to sense that guiding hand, to glimpse that bright meaning beyond and above my self and my wishes."

If God was guiding his hand, the mission on which Solzhenitsyn had embarked, at divine bidding, was to bear witness on behalf of his fellow *zeks*, as he refers to the countless prisoners in the Soviet gulag. In *Invisible Allies* and *The Oak and the Calf* he speaks of carrying "the dying wishes of millions whose last whisper, last moan, had been cut short on some hut floor in some prison camp." And again: "My point of departure [was] that I did not belong to myself alone, that my literary destiny was not just my own, but that of millions who had not lived to scrawl or gasp or croak the truth about their lot as jailbirds."

Having been a *zek* himself, Solzhenitsyn identified completely with his fellow prisoners. One sometimes gets the feeling in reading Solzhenitsyn that, in the terrible morality of Stalinist to-

* Translated by Alexis Klimoff and Michael Nicholson. Counterpoint, 344 pp., $29.50.

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talitarianism, to have been a *zek* was a mark of the highest distinction, while not to have been a *zek* was to have been on the one hand wondrously lucky, but on the other hand in some sense spiritually deficient. Nadezhda Vasilyevna Bukharina, a woman who helped Solzhenitsyn in storing, reproducing, and smuggling his manuscripts out of the Soviet Union, once told him: "Before I die I have to make up for the fact that I never saw the inside of the camps."

For Solzhenitsyn, the *zeks* were Russia's saving remnant, and he was their voice. But he also viewed himself as speaking for something else: the entire tradition of Russian literature. Not *Soviet* literature—that was permanently in thrall to ideology, to supporting the state, the party, the full grotesque apparatus of Communism. By contrast, Russian literature, represented by Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Chekhov, Pasternak, and others, was in thrall to nothing but its own freedom of spirit, hostage only to the truth of human complexity. This was a distinction that Solzhenitsyn insisted upon during his days as an underground writer. Of his falling out with Aleksandr Tvardovsky, the editor of *Novy Mir*, he writes: "The Soviet editor and the Russian prose writer could no longer march side by side because his literature and mine had sharply and irrevocably diverged."

THESE, THEN, were the twin poles of his mission—to give voice to the *zeks*, and to reclaim the heritage of Russian literature. In *The Oak and the Calf*, at one of many points when he recalls thinking the game might be up for him, Solzhenitsyn writes: "Why must this work be brought to nothing? It was not just that it was my work; it was almost the only work that had survived as a monument to the truth." Whether or not it was "just" his work, Solzhenitsyn certainly felt that the fate of the truth, and perhaps even of Russia itself, was all on his shoulders. Anyone coming after him would find it "still harder to dig out the truth, while those who had lived earlier had either not survived or had not preserved what they had written."

Was he correct, or did he overdramatize? On the merely mechanical level, what Solzhenitsyn achieved—the writing of his books under the most difficult of conditions—is astounding. While, in effect, in hiding, he produced before his fiftieth year an entire *oeuvre* of stories, novels, poems, a history, memoirs, and a vast historical novel (later to be completed in the United States). In a minuscule handwriting, leaving no margins lest he waste precious paper, he scribbled away at a fantastic clip. In *Invisible Allies* he describes his daily regimen while working on *The Gulag Archipelago*: he would rise at 1:00 A.M. and work through till 9:00 A.M., then start on a second day's portion of work, quitting for dinner at 6:00 P.M., sleeping from 7:00 P.M. till 1:00 A.M., and then begin again.

All this was done while awaiting a knock on the door from the KGB. His manuscripts had to be kept hidden not only from the regime but from his own first wife, whose trustworthiness had been forfeited, and he sometimes slept with a pitchfork beside his bed. Yet he continued, relentlessly, to work, without the aid of editors or publishers and without any certainty that the typed and retyped copies of his books which made their uncertain transmission through the underground railroad of *samizdat* would ever see the light of day.

As for the substance of his achievement, even though all sorts of people have scratched about for reasons to deny it, the plain fact is that "in terms of the effect he has had on history," as the journalist David Remnick put it recently in the *New Yorker*, Solzhenitsyn is "the dominant writer of this century." He has been something writers often wish to be but rarely are—what he called in *The First Circle* a "second government." One man alone, without aid of weapons, a party, or even a movement behind him, took on the most systematically brutal regime the modern world has known and, without even benefit of support in the realm of public opinion, brought it to its knees.

Given the astonishing clip at which he worked in his underground years, it is not surprising that Solzhenitsyn, in *The Oak and the Calf*, laments about the cost this exacted from him as a writer: "I never had time to look for the precise, the definitive word." True, living underground, he had absolute freedom, with neither an editor's nor a government's censorship to worry about. Yet in sheer literary terms there was an "inevitable drawback":

> When you have been writing for ten or twelve years in impenetrable solitude, you begin without realizing it to let yourself go, to indulge yourself, or simply to lose your eye for jarring invective, for bombast, for banal conventional joins where you should have found a firm fastening.

Because of the extraordinary conditions under which Solzhenitsyn's books were produced, it is

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difficult to enter standard literary judgments about them. Norman Podhoretz, for example, has declared that Solzhenitsyn's two major nonfiction works, *The Gulag Archipelago* and *The Oak and the Calf*, are "among the very greatest books of the age." But for him the novels and stories, though some are better than others, are finally stillborn: "Despite everything that is right about them, they always fail to live."*

This is a more stringent view of Solzhenitsyn's fiction than the orthodox one, which continues to rank *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* highly and regards both *The First Circle* and *Cancer Ward* as important works in the realist tradition. What is undeniable about them, however, is that they reflect Solzhenitsyn's own constricted view of what literature is for. He has attempted to write Tolstoyan novels, but to do so under the moralizing code adopted by Tolstoy at a time when the latter's own best fiction was long behind him and he had all but disowned it. "You ought not to approach literature without a moral responsibility for every word you write," Solzhenitsyn told David Remnick, who adds that Solzhenitsyn "cannot abide experimentalism for its own sake, or pure pleasure as a literary end."

Every work of Solzhenitsyn's has a point, and the point is always political, from *Ivan Denisovich*, which set out to expose the brute fact of the slave-labor camps, to his attempt to tell the true history of the Russian Revolution in *August 1914* and the subsequent volumes of *The Red Wheel* (completed but not yet fully available in English translation). These works resist judgment on purely or even on largely aesthetic grounds. One would almost do better to judge them by how well they make their points—which is to say, by the degree to which they have fulfilled Solzhenitsyn's mission.

THAT MISSION is even larger than one might have thought. Helping to destroy Communism, it turns out, was only part of it. As Solzhenitsyn writes in *Invisible Allies*:

> Beyond the immediate struggle with the Communist state loomed a greater challenge still: the Russian spirit lay comatose, as if crushed beneath a mighty rock, and this vast tombstone . . . must somehow be raised, overturned, and sent crashing downhill.

Here we enter the complicated—one might say Conradian—terrain of Russian mysticism. By mysticism I mean the notion, held by Solzhenitsyn, that in the Russian spirit lie secrets, and, just possibly, a remedy for the spiritual vacuity of the West. "I put no hopes in the West—indeed no Russian ever should," Solzhenitsyn writes in *Invisible Allies*. "If the 20th century has any lesson for mankind, it is we who will teach the West, not the West us. Excessive ease and prosperity have weakened their will and their reason."

This notion of the West as distinctly not the solution, but as part of the same problem of modernity that brought about the hideous excrescence of Communism, has deep roots in Russia's Slavophile past. But it also has roots in Solzhenitsyn's own intense distrust of Western leftists, who stood by for decades while Russians suffered. Throughout his books, he takes shots at "useful idiots" (Lenin's term)—"the anti-fascists and the existentialists, the pacifists, the hearts that bled for Africa [but] had nothing to say about the destruction of our culture, about the destruction of our nation." When Jean-Paul Sartre wished to meet with him, Solzhenitsyn felt honor-bound to refuse this particularly egregious "useful idiot." At one point in 1972, when the Soviet leaders were making it especially hot for him, Solzhenitsyn thought to stage interviews in the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*; but their respective Moscow correspondents, Hedrick Smith and Robert Kaiser, appalled him with the triviality of their questions.

Solzhenitsyn has never been a public-relations man's dream. "On one score I was adamant," he writes in *Invisible Allies*, "fame would never win me over." It never came close to doing so. When, an exile from his homeland, he arrived in the United States in 1975, Solzhenitsyn promptly told off Americans for their ignorance, their weakness, and worse. He accused us of collusion with tyranny: in pursuit of profit, American businessmen were selling the latest detection devices to the KGB to help imprison Soviet dissidents. He attacked our foreign policy: Soviet dissidents, he reported, "couldn't understand the flabbiness of the truce concluded in Vietnam," and the entire policy of détente showed nothing but a wholesale misunderstanding of Communism. As for our popular culture, it was beneath contempt. Americans, he declared, live behind a "wall of disastrous unawareness or nonchalant superiority."

"Being an émigré is the most difficult skill to master," remarked the Russian émigré Nikita

* "The Terrible Question of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn," COMMENTARY, February 1985.

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Struve, head of a Russian-language press in Paris; it was a skill Solzhenitsyn showed no desire to learn. Attacks upon him now came not only from the Kremlin but from the West, including from anti-Communists and from his fellow émigrés. Disagreement soon merged into accusation: it was said of Solzhenitsyn that he wanted Russia to become a new Byzantium, that his favored form of government was theocracy, that he was an anti-Semite, and finally that he was nothing more than an ayatollah.

Solzhenitsyn soon decided that speechifying was not worth the energy and the emotional drain it exacted. In the eighteen years he spent in Vermont with his second wife and four sons, he worked on completing the various "knots" of *The Red Wheel*, and putting much of the rest of his enormous *oeuvre* in order. He predicted his own eventual return to Russia, and awaited the time when it would come about.

When it did, after the fall of the Soviet Union, things did not quite work out as he might have envisioned. Having fulfilled his literary duty, Solzhenitsyn now meant to fulfill his duty to society. His ambition, which had very little to do with power or politics in the normal sense, was to revive the Russian spirit, a task at least as hard to accomplish in post-Communist Russia as under the Communist regime, if not harder.

In *The Russian Question at the End of the Twentieth Century*,* Solzhenitsyn explains why that should be so. With an acidulousness of which Joseph Conrad himself might fundamentally approve, he surveys the many barbarities and betrayals of Russian history. He writes of Three Times of Troubles (the capital letters are his): the 17th century, when Russian despotism started in earnest; the year 1917, when the Bolsheviks sent the efforts toward reform that had begun under czarism crashing down; and today, when "we are creating a cruel, beastly, criminal society." If Russian population growth is now falling, and male life expectancy is at roughly the same point as it is in Bangladesh, Indonesia, and certain countries of Africa, all this is owing to the despair of the Russian people, a despair Solzhenitsyn understands better than anyone on earth.

WHAT, TO ask the question Chernyshevski asked more than a century ago, is to be done? For Solzhenitsyn, there is altogether too much talk in the new Russia about the economy; what such talk signifies to him is, after all, only a "new explosion of materialism, this time a 'capitalist' one," and another dose of materialism will hardly do anything to save the Russian soul. Characteristically, his point of attack is moral. "We must build a moral Russia, or not at all. . . . We must preserve and nourish all the good seeds which miraculously have not been trampled down." But in what soil are these seeds to take root? The character of the Russian people, "so well known to our forebears, so abundantly depicted by our writers and observed by thoughtful foreigners," has been all but killed off by the Bolsheviks, who "scorched out compassion, the willingness to help others, the feeling of brotherhood."

Solzhenitsyn's reception in his homeland has been decidedly mixed, at best. Although, as David Remnick reports, a large number of Russians have told pollsters they would like Solzhenitsyn to be their president, elsewhere "a more ironical attitude . . . has formed. I found the attitude ranging from indifference to mockery." Lots of people, one imagines, and not just in Russia, would prefer that he just go away. Even his American publisher has said that he does not anticipate a large sale for the next installment of *The Red Wheel*. "The interest is just not there anymore."

Aleksandr Isayevich Solzhenitsyn is nearly eighty years old, a prophet without honor in his own country. "I feel sorry for Russia," says a character in *August 1914*. So does Solzhenitsyn, but neither his sorrow nor his patriotism has ever gotten in the way of his extravagant idealism, or stopped him from telling his countrymen precisely what he thinks. He is, in short, a fanatic, but of the kind of which true prophets are made. Only Russia could produce such a man—and only Russians could ignore him. Joseph Conrad would have understood.

* Translated by Yermolai Solzhenitsyn. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 135 pp., $15.00.

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OBSERVATIONS

Jewish Liberalism Revisited

Charles S. Liebman & Steven M. Cohen

IT IS a truism embraced by countless spokesmen for American Jews, and by no small number of observers: Jews are more liberal than their fellow Americans, *and* their liberalism derives from loyalty to Jewish "values" or, more specifically, to the Jewish religious tradition. "Jews are the most liberal group in the country," wrote the sociologist Nathan Glazer over 40 years ago, in a statement with which few have had occasion to quibble. And as for the reason why, here is Albert Vorspan, who served for many years as the leading spokesman for the "social-action" program of Reform Judaism:

> A commitment to social justice is inherent in Judaism. . . . [A] Judaism without keen involvement in the struggle for human decency is a contradiction, a denial of the deepest elements of the Jewish spirit.

But is either part of the truism true? To answer this question, we examined evidence from a survey of American social attitudes conducted almost annually between 1973 and 1994 by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC). What the data reveal is that Jews do indeed differ from non-Jews in terms of their own self-image: a full 48 percent of the former, versus only 27 percent of the latter, define themselves as liberal. And Jews also tend to *be* more liberal than other Americans on at least three defining issues: a commitment to the welfare state and to some redistribution of income; a concern for oppressed minorities, especially American blacks; and a passion for individual freedom, especially freedom of speech. On still other issues, especially having to do with sexual morality and with the separation of church and state, they are more liberal still.

We will have occasion below to qualify these statements significantly. But let us pause to note a deep problem, right at the start, with the standard explanation for Jewish political attitudes. For if, as many contend, political liberalism is somehow embedded in Jewish tradition ("inherent in Judaism," in Vorspan's words), those Jews who are closest to the religious tradition should be the most liberal, and those farthest away should be the least liberal. In fact, however, the opposite is the case. Frequent synagogue attendees register views in the NORC survey that are consistently *less* liberal on almost every issue than those who attend synagogue infrequently or not at all, or who are intermarried.

This pattern holds true not only on such matters as aid to the poor or to blacks, or on the government's role in reducing income differences, or on freedom of speech, but—dramatically—on sexual and social matters as well. For example, 58 percent of intermarried Jews say that homosexual sex is not wrong, in contrast to just 10 percent of those who attend religious services at least twice a month (the comparable figure for the vast majority in between is 49 percent). The only exception to the

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pattern concerns church-state issues, and specifically prayer in the public schools: here, religious, less religious, and nonreligious Jews alike are all opposed, in almost equal numbers.

That exception aside, however, if we judge by the religious *behavior* of American Jews, there is little support for the notion that Jewish liberalism derives from an attachment to the Jewish religious tradition.

Nor should that really come as a surprise. Jewish religious values, as expressed in the Bible, the Talmud, and later rabbinic literature, are ethnocentric rather than universalistic. In most traditional sources, Jews are commanded to assist the Jewish poor but not necessarily the non-Jewish poor; to return the lost objects of their fellow Jews but not the lost objects of non-Jews; and so forth. What is more, the Torah imposes restraints on freedom of speech, is far more sensitive to questions of individual obligation than to questions of individual rights, and envisions a society of laws to regulate the private conduct of individuals. True, the tradition enjoins the practices of compassion, concern for others, and even a measure of social justice; but, with notable exceptions, these injunctions are intended to regulate relations among Jews, not between Jews and non-Jews.

When it comes to sexual morality, the gulf between the clear teaching of Jewish tradition and contemporary liberalism is much wider still. The Ten Commandments flatly proscribe adultery. As for homosexuality, the biblical passages prohibiting it, along with such other "abominations" as incest and bestiality, were deemed so central that the ancient rabbis decreed they be read aloud in the synagogue on Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the Jewish calendar. The tradition's continuing concern with the proper channeling of sexual appetites is evident in the relatively strict codes of dress and in proscriptions on relations between the sexes that characterize millennia of Jewish law and practice. In short, no credible case can be made that a permissive attitude toward extramarital or homosexual sex represents the Jewish tradition. Quite the contrary.

OF COURSE, those who trace Jewish liberalism to Judaism have a fallback position, and one worth considering seriously. What really motivates American Jews, they say, are certain ingrained attitudes which, though ultimately derived from the religious tradition, by now transcend it and exist independently of specific religious behavior like synagogue attendance. The Jewish tradition, they concede, may not be unambiguously liberal in the contemporary sense; but that is not the point. After all, even the authors of the American Constitution presupposed the institution of slavery, and made no provision to ensure women the right to vote. But if, within the *spirit* of that same Constitution, slavery could be abolished, and women granted suffrage, it is similarly possible to maintain that no inversion of the Jewish tradition is involved in applying to society at large the virtues of compassion and social justice which the tradition mandates in connection with Jews.

If we accept this line of reasoning, it makes perfect sense that non-Orthodox Jews (who incidentally far outnumber the Orthodox in America) should tend to be more liberal. After all, it was Reform Judaism that, starting in the 19th century, consciously set out both to discard Jewish practices it found outmoded and, at the same time, to universalize what it took to be the core Jewish values. According to the mandates of their own religious tradition, non-Orthodox Jews *ought* to be more liberal.

Unfortunately, however, this too does not get us very far. For one thing, while an insistence upon compassion, a demand for social justice, and even (according to the scholar Moshe Greenberg) freedom of speech may have roots in the tradition, a commitment to any or all of these does not necessarily lead in a straight line to the particular positions of many contemporary liberals. A concern for the equal treatment of minorities, for example, need hardly translate into support for what today travels under the banner of affirmative action; a belief in freedom of speech need not require one to adopt a tolerant attitude toward the spread of pornography (an issue that, as it happens, has split the liberal and feminist communities). In each of these cases, and in many others like them, one could argue that contemporary liberalism, far from fulfilling the spirit of traditional Jewish values, traduces both spirit and letter alike.

For another thing, legitimate interpretation of the tradition has its limits, and no tradition can survive if it is infinitely malleable. Many of the same Jewish liberals who appeal to the tradition in defending their zeal for "social justice" tend simply to ignore or radically distort its teachings with regard to relations between the sexes. Nor, finally, can any tradition be legitimately interpreted except by those who understand it—something that cannot be said of many who presume to speak in the name of Jewish values.

HERE, INDEED, is where the major qualification we mentioned at the outset becomes relevant. For the most striking result of our examination of the NORC data is this: when Jews are compared not with other Americans in general but specifically with other Americans *who resemble them*—in age, education, income, and pattern of residence—the vaunted Jewish "difference" all but disappears.

Thus, on the question of whether the government should spend more on welfare, Jews are only four percentage points more liberal than their non-Jewish peers, and only two percentage points more liberal on the issue of whether the government should act to reduce income

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gaps between rich and poor. Similarly, Jews are no more likely than their social and economic peers to favor greater government aid to American blacks, and only three percentage points more likely to attribute the disadvantaged position of blacks to discrimination. Finally, when it comes to freedom of expression, Jews are only three percentage points more likely than their non-Jewish peers to be in favor of atheists or Communists speaking in their communities or teaching at universities.

To be sure, Jews do still take decidedly more liberal (not to say libertine) positions on sexual morality than even those non-Jews who share their age, education, income, and residential patterns. This is a phenomenon noted by Earl Raab in "Are American Jews Still Liberal?" (COMMENTARY, February 1996), and we can confirm it on the basis of a much larger sample over a longer period of time. Thus, holding constant for socioeconomic factors and residence patterns, we found that 24 percent more Jews than non-Jews approve of abortions for any reason; 21 percent more approve of legalizing marijuana; 7 percent more are opposed to banning pornography; 7 percent more assert that pre-marital sex is not wrong at all, 15 percent more that extra-marital sex is not always wrong, and 26 percent more that gay sex is not wrong at all. An analogous gulf divides Jews from similarly situated non-Jews when it comes to church-state relations: 37 percent more of the former oppose prayer in the public schools—and as we noted earlier, this opposition cuts across denominational lines.

In the end, though, these may be the only discrepancies that still need explaining. American Jewish liberalism does not, it turns out, nowadays comprise a *special* sympathy for African-Americans, or for the poor; nor does it feature an extraordinary attachment to civil liberties. As for those issues on which the Jewish position is still distinctive, on at least one set of them, namely relations between church and state, that position might arguably be traced to a perception of group self-interest: since America is (still) a Christian country, prayer in the public schools would tend to take on a Christian character, thus implicitly posing a threat to a religious minority like the Jews. Similar fears, real or imagined, may also lie in part behind Jewish permissiveness in those sexual matters on which Christian churches have taken a strongly conservative position.

But whether this sufficiently explains the anomaly or not, one thing we can say with confidence: whatever the source of the—selective—liberalism of American Jews may be, there is little if any evidence to support the notion that it reflects the impact of Jewish values, or of the Jewish tradition.

Music

I Heard It at the Movies

Terry Teachout

FILM COMPOSERS, long treated as second-class figures by the musical establishment, have lately come into their own. *Schwann Opus*, the quarterly catalogue of recorded classical music, recently featured two of them on its cover: Miklós Rózsa, who wrote the scores for such big-budget Hollywood epics as *Ben-Hur* and *El Cid*, and Bernard Herrmann, best known for his collaborations with Orson Welles (*Citizen Kane*) and Alfred Hitchcock (*Psycho*). *Gramophone*, the classical-music magazine, has launched a section devoted to film music and has also brought out a collection of reviews, *Gramophone Film Music Good CD Guide*.[1] And there has just appeared the first English-language biography of Erich Wolfgang Korngold, the Austrian composer who, in addition to scoring such popular films of the 30's and 40's as *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, also wrote con-

TERRY TEACHOUT, COMMENTARY's *music critic, reviews recordings of film music for* Fi: The Magazine of Music and Sound.

[1] Gramophone Publications Ltd., 256 pp., $15.95 (paper).

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cert-hall works premiered by Jascha Heifetz, Artur Schnabel, and Bruno Walter.[2] Even more significantly, the major classical labels have begun recording movie music in earnest, issuing not only soundtracks of current films but scores of the past in new recordings by first-rank orchestras.

All this constitutes a reversal of a long-prevalent attitude. In the age of high modernism, movie music was considered kitsch, and those who composed it—and, worse yet, profited by doing so—thereby soiled themselves. Before going to Hollywood, Korngold and Rózsa had been viewed as distinguished composers; afterward, it was all but impossible for them to find an audience for their concert music. Even performers who worked in Hollywood were regarded with suspicion: the Hollywood String Quartet, consisting of the first-chair string players of the 20th Century-Fox studio orchestra, was never fully accepted by American critics, though its many recordings for Capitol (all of which have been reissued on CD by Testament) leave no doubt that it was one of the finest ensembles in the history of chamber music.[3]

Why, then, has film music suddenly become respectable? In the case of the record industry, the answer has less to do with aesthetics than with economics. In the last year, all the major labels have cut back on their recording schedules, and in particular on their financial commitments to symphony orchestras. EMI has dropped the Philadelphia Orchestra (which responded by going on strike, an interesting example of the spread of the entitlement mentality to the middle class); Philips is about to let the Boston Symphony go; DGG is making its last recordings with the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra and the Dresden Staatskapelle; Sony and Decca/London have sharply reduced their support for the Berlin Philharmonic and the Cleveland Orchestra. Summing up these developments last May in the *Washington Post*, the critic Tim Page went so far as to suggest that "the [record] industry, as we have known it, might just be coming to an end."

The reasons for the slump in classical recording are complex, but one aspect of the new reality is starkly simple: full-price recordings of the standard orchestral repertoire have been losing their market. By contrast, not only do full-price recordings of symphonic film scores seem to be selling, but critics now take them more seriously than ever before. This raises an interesting question. Are we in the midst of a long-overdue revaluation of an unappreciated musical idiom, or at the end of a precipitous decline in standards? Is film music middlebrow schlock, or is it art?

MOTION PICTURES are by definition a non-naturalistic medium: actors and actresses appear not in the flesh but as flickering shadows on a screen. Accordingly, from the earliest days of the medium, filmmakers have used background music to strengthen the theatrical illusion of reality by enveloping the audience in sound. When the Lumière family's silent films were first shown in public in 1895, it was to the accompaniment of a piano. By 1908, no lesser a composer than Camille Saint-Saëns was commissioned to write music for *L'Assassinat du Duc de Guise*. Original scores of this kind remained comparatively rare until the introduction in 1927 of "talking pictures"; but they then became customary. By the mid-30's, most of the major film studios had their own resident orchestras.[4]

In Europe, it has been common since the time of Saint-Saëns's 1908 commission for noted classical composers—including Benjamin Britten, Darius Milhaud, Sergei Prokofiev, Dmitri Shostakovich, William Walton, and Ralph Vaughan Williams—to write film music. But in Hollywood, where about 400 movies were released annually throughout the 30's and 40's, things were done on a more industrial scale through the hiring of full-time staff composers. Since most early sound films were musicals, producers naturally looked to Broadway for their musical talent. Max Steiner (Warner Bros.), Alfred Newman (20th Century-Fox), and Herbert Stothart (MGM) had all conducted musical comedy and operetta before coming to Hollywood as composers. When they began scoring dramatic films, they no less naturally looked to the 19th-century Romantics as their musical models. That is how the characteristic sound of Hollywood scores in the 30's—the song-form melodies of Broadway, draped in the high-calorie orchestral rhetoric of Wagner, Liszt, Tchaikowsky, and Richard Strauss—took shape.

Some Hollywood composers of the 30's were musical illiterates who had to rely on "orchestrators" to ghostwrite their scores; others were musicians of high accomplishment (Newman, for instance, was an extraordinarily talented conductor). But none was a classical composer by training, and their music inevitably reflected the limitations of their backgrounds. A case in point is Max Steiner, the most representative figure of his Hollywood generation. Though Steiner wrote effectively for such films as *The Informer* (1935), *Gone With the Wind* (1939), and *Casablanca* (1941), to hear any of his music divorced from its cinematic context is to realize just how provincial and derivative he was.[5]

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[2] *Erich Wolfgang Korngold*, by Jessica Duchen Phaidon, 239 pp., $19.95 (paper).

[3] For a discussion of these recordings, see "The Hollywood and Other String Quartets" by Samuel Lipman, COMMENTARY, February 1983.

[4] By far the best book about American film music is Christopher Palmer's *The Composer in Hollywood* (1990), on which I have drawn in writing this piece.

[5] Excerpts from several of Steiner's scores have been recorded by Charles Gerhardt and the National Philharmonic on *Now, Voyager: The Classic Film Scores of Max Steiner* (RCA 0136-2-RG).

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The only composer of independent reputation to work for the movies during this period was Erich Wolfgang Korngold, and his success, deserved though it was, says more about the narrowness of Hollywood's musical culture than about his own phenomenal gifts. Born in 1897, Korngold began composing at the age of six; his Op. 1, a piano trio, was premiered and published just seven years later, and by the time he was eighteen his opera *Violanta* had entered the repertory of the Vienna Hofoper. A quintessential *Jugendstil* figure, Korngold wrote in an elaborately chromatic, late-Romantic style which delighted Viennese audiences, and his music was promptly taken up by many of the leading European performers of the day.

In 1934, Warner Bros. made a film version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* directed by Max Reinhardt, the Austrian stage impresario, and starring James Cagney, Mickey Rooney, and Olivia de Havilland. Reinhardt persuaded his friend Korngold to adapt and conduct Mendelssohn's incidental music for the sound track; Korngold found the experience congenial, and subsequently came back for more. By the late 30's, unable to return to Austria after the *Anschluss*, he settled permanently in the United States and spent the next seven years composing solely for films. It was a good match: Korngold's post-Straussian idiom was a more virtuosic extension of the existing Hollywood "sound," and his quasi-operatic scores for such swashbuckling films as *Captain Blood* (1935), *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938), and *The Sea Hawk* (1940) were highly influential, reinforcing the Russo-Germanic tendencies already well-established among Hollywood's lesser lights.[6]

It was not until 1939, when Aaron Copland composed his first feature-film score, that a different, modernist style at last found a foothold in Hollywood.

Copland, who scored five commercial movies between 1939 and 1948, was the first major American composer (and still the only one) to work regularly and successfully in Hollywood, as well as the first composer (and, again, still the only one) to write for American films without besmirching his reputation in the larger world of concert music. This was all the more notable in that Copland never "wrote down" to Hollywood: his film scores are indistinguishable in style from such masterpieces of his middle period as the Piano Sonata (1941) and *Appalachian Spring* (1944). Furthermore, Copland was both selective and shrewd in his choice of assignments, working on the adaptations of John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* (1939) and *The Red Pony* (1948), Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* (1940), and Henry James's *Washington Square* (filmed as *The Heiress*, 1948).

In these films, Copland showed an impressive grasp of the way in which good movie music can, in his own words, "provide the underpinning for the theatrical build-up of a scene and then round it off with a sense of finality." His lean harmonies, spare scoring, angular rhythms, and folk-flavored melodies came as a breath of fresh air in a musical environment previously dominated by the thick orchestral impasto of Steiner and Korngold.[7]

Also in 1939, the Hungarian composer Miklós Rózsa joined the staff of MGM, subsequently composing scores for *Double Indemnity* (1944), *Spellbound* (1945), *Julius Caesar* (1953), *Ben-Hur* (1959), and *El Cid* (1962). Rózsa became the most famous film composer of the postwar studio era, and one of the very few who also wrote extensively for the concert hall. Unlike Copland, he deliberately simplified his bittersweet, Bartók-influenced style in writing for movies, and his critical reputation suffered as a result. Only lately has his nonfilm music, which is far more individualistic than his work for Hollywood, begun to be recorded and played widely.[8]

Hollywood's third great modernist was Bernard Herrmann. Born in 1911, Herrmann came to Hollywood in 1941, having spent the preceding decade working in radio. An admirer of Charles Ives, Frederick Delius, and Gustav Holst—none of whom, including the quintessentially American Ives, was then well-known in America—Herrmann rejected the lush Hollywood sound of the 30's in favor of a simple yet unmistakably contemporary style based on slowly shifting, ambiguously tonal harmonies and an orchestral palette remarkable for its range of instrumental color. (The first scene of *Citizen Kane*, the movie that brought him to Hollywood, is scored for twelve flutes, contrabass clarinets, trombones, tubas, vibraphone, and percussion.) No composer has written music for a greater number of important films—Herrmann scored *Citizen Kane* and *The Magnificent Ambersons*

[6] Excerpts from the sound tracks of sixteen of Korngold's films, conducted with incomparable verve by the composer, can be heard on *Erich Wolfgang Korngold: The Warner Bros. Years* (Turner Classic Movies/Rhino Movie Music R2 72243, two CDs). The most important of his nonfilm scores are the Violin Concerto, Op. 35 (1945), premiered and recorded by Jascha Heifetz (RCA 7963-2-RG), and the Symphony in F Sharp, Op. 40 (1952), recorded most recently by Edward Downes and the BBC Philharmonic (Chandos CHAN 9171).

[7] None of Copland's film scores has been recorded complete—an astonishing oversight—but suites from *Our Town*, *The Red Pony*, and *The Heiress*, plus a five-movement suite called *Music for Movies* (containing excerpts from *Our Town*, *Of Mice and Men*, and *The City*, a 1939 documentary), are available in excellent performances by Leonard Slatkin and the St. Louis Symphony (RCA 09026-61699-2).

[8] Two of Rózsa's most striking concert works are *Theme, Variations, and Finale*, Op. 13a (1943), recorded by James Sedares and the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra as part of the first volume of a series (Koch International 3-7191-2H1), and the Violin Concerto, Op. 24 (1956), composed for and recorded by Jascha Heifetz (RCA 7963-2-RG, coupled with the Korngold Concerto).

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(1942) for Orson Welles; *Vertigo* (1958), *North by Northwest* (1959), and *Psycho* (1960) for Alfred Hitchcock; *Fahrenheit 451* (1966) and *The Bride Wore Black* (1968) for François Truffaut; and *Taxi Driver* (1975), completed just before his death, for Martin Scorsese—and none has written better music for the screen.[9]

Copland, Rózsa, and Herrmann inspired a generation of musicians who, starting in the mid-40's, brought American film music into the 20th century. Elmer Bernstein, Hugo Friedhofer, Jerry Goldsmith, Jerome Moross, Alex North, David Raksin, and Leonard Rosenman were all strongly influenced by the crosscurrents of modernism, including jazz, and all wrote accessible, dramatically persuasive music that remains fresh to this day. Unfortunately, however, after World War II the stigma of a Hollywood connection grew even more damning among serious—and, increasingly, serialist—musicians, and none of these men has been recognized as a composer of distinction; now that many of their best scores are available on CD, one hopes their reputations will grow in coming years.

WITH THE break-up of the studio system in the early 60's, the music departments and their staff orchestras were disbanded. But what really rendered symphonic scores unfashionable was the rise of rock-and-roll. In 1966, rejecting Bernard Herrmann's music for *Torn Curtain*, Alfred Hitchcock explained that he wanted a rock-flavored score instead. This not only brought to a close Hitchcock's eleven-year-long collaboration with Herrmann but signaled the end of the golden age of film music.

To be sure, John Williams's Korngoldesque score for *Star Wars* (1977) did lead to a revival of the symphonic form. But none of today's younger Hollywood composers (some of whom, including Randy Edelman and Danny Elfman, started out as rock musicians) has the technical finish or stylistic authority of a Korngold or a Herrmann. To the extent that there can still be said to be a film-music culture, it is—just as in the 30's—more popular than serious. Comparatively few scores written in the last quarter-century have anything to offer a thoughtful listener outside the context of the films for which they were written.

Can we not say the same, though, of the vast majority of scores composed since the introduction of sound in 1927? Indeed we can. Like most postmodern "revaluations" of the art of the past, the recent revival of interest in film music has been noteworthy chiefly for its lack of discrimination. Deservedly long-forgotten scores of the utmost banality, now lovingly reconstructed and recorded by film-music historians, have been hailed with no less enthusiasm than greets the release of a new Bernard Herrmann CD.

Still, the revival has also brought to the attention of a wider audience the music of a small number of outstanding composers, and its success marks yet another step in the collapse of the cultural hegemony of the postwar avant-garde. As the major classical-record companies now recognize, film music speaks directly and compellingly to younger listeners to whom the "new music" of the 60's and 70's has nothing to say. In this sense, its current popularity is comparable to the (now-fading) vogue of the minimalist composers of the 80's, whose music, simple-minded though it was, still had more to offer than the sterile experimentalism of the avant-garde. To paraphrase the old song, it isn't great, but it'll have to do until the real thing comes along.

[9] A suite from *Citizen Kane* has been recorded by Charles Gerhardt and the National Philharmonic on *Citizen Kane: The Classic Film Scores of Bernard Herrmann* (RCA 0707-2-RG). *Bernard Herrmann: The Film Scores*, the best collection of Herrmann's music currently available, contains excerpts from most of his other important scores, well-played by Esa-Pekka Salonen and the Los Angeles Philharmonic (Sony ASK 62700).

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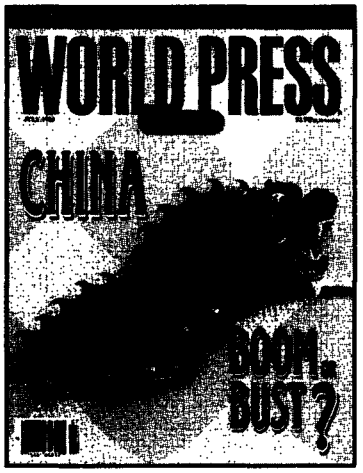

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Books in Review

Race, Class & Culture

When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor

by William Julius Wilson

Knopf. 352 pp. $26.00

Reviewed by
Leslie Lenkowsky

In 1978, William Julius Wilson, then a little-known sociologist at the University of Chicago, stirred an intellectual furor with *The Declining Significance of Race*, a book arguing that social class was becoming more important than racial discrimination in determining the prospects of blacks in American society.

Using the ghettos of Chicago as his laboratory, Wilson showed in *The Declining Significance of Race* that for blacks who succeeded in acquiring basic skills, there were fewer and fewer barriers to higher education, upwardly mobile careers, and integration into American society. At the same time, those, chiefly from poverty-stricken backgrounds, who failed to acquire such skills were finding their opportunities ever more limited.

This thesis cast doubt on a number of fashionable verities, including the worth of race-based remedies like affirmative action for dealing with poverty, and it infuriated the leaders of many civil-rights and liberal policy organizations. Stung by charges that his work was offering aid and comfort to the Right, Wilson took pains in his next book, *The Truly Disadvantaged* (1987), to distinguish himself from conservative scholars like George Gilder, Lawrence Mead, and Charles Murray.

In particular, although he agreed with those critics that the "underclass" was becoming larger and more concentrated in the inner city, Wilson disputed their contention that the cause lay in a "culture of poverty" or a "culture of welfare," pointing instead to economic factors. For Wilson, what undermined the ability of black males to create and support stable families was the decreasing availability of legal employment opportunities in the inner cities. This in turn led to a shortage of marriageable black men and to the proliferation among "the truly disadvantaged" of single-parent, female-headed households.

The policy prescription Wilson drew from this diagnosis was straightforward: the "self-help" and "workfare" programs favored by conservatives would not suffice. Instead, a major project of social and economic reconstruction was required, something on the model, and on the scale, of a Marshall plan for the cities.

Wilson's latest book, *When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor*, once again adumbrates his now-familiar theme: the primacy of economic factors in creating and sustaining inner-city ghettos.

But a new element has crept in. As he documents the process by which the restructuring of American industry in the 1980's led to the impoverishment of marginal communities, Wilson also notes that economic deterioration itself has bred a set of "cultural traits and behaviors" which serve to lock denizens of the inner city in destitution.

Leslie Lenkowsky *is president of the Hudson Institute.*

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New and Noteworthy

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The Elusive Japanese Diplomat Who Risked His Life to Rescue 10,000 Jews from the Holocaust

Hillel Levine

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—M. Scott Peck

"A fascinating addition to Holocaust literature."

—Kirkus Reviews

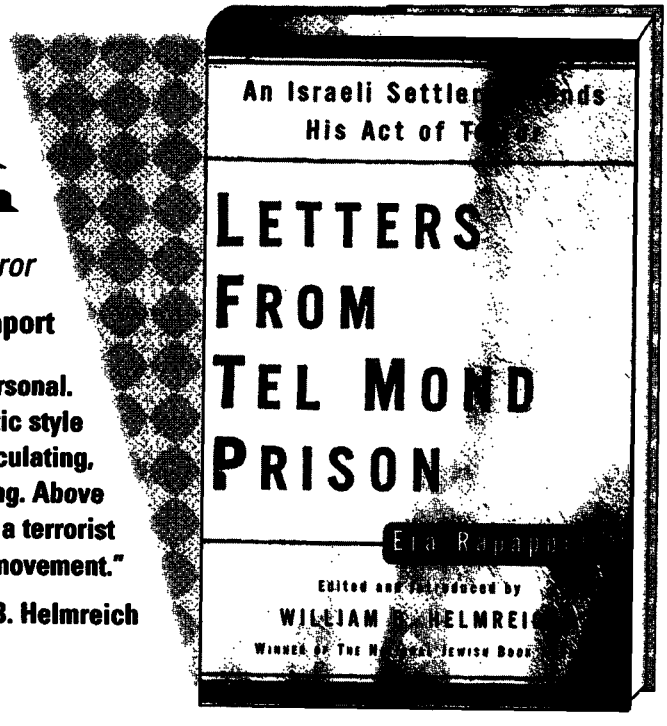
Letters from Tel Mond Prison

An Israeli Settler Defends His Act of Terror

Era Rapaport

"This book is brutally honest and deeply personal. It is written in an authentic and idiosyncratic style that is alternately emotional and coldly calculating, logical yet irrational, charming yet horrifying. Above all, it is an astoundingly revealing profile of a terrorist and a movement."

—from the introduction by William B. Helmreich



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The chronic inability to find and keep jobs, the inadequate income that results, the absence of successful role models among their neighbors, and the disorganization of their communities have all taken a moral toll on ghetto residents, Wilson writes. The longer joblessness persists, the more likely inner-city blacks are to feel powerless—and the more fecklessly they will act.

Particularly troublesome to Wilson is the attitude toward families. Contemporary sexual mores, already loose in the larger society all around them, are even looser among the urban black poor, both male and female, who

> believe that since most marriages will eventually break up and since marriages no longer represent meaningful relationships, it is better to avoid the entanglements of wedlock altogether.

Culture, then, seems to matter almost as much as economics to the Wilson of *When Work Disappears*. And whether or not the sources of that culture must be sought in economic considerations—specifically, in the flight of businesses and jobs from ghetto neighborhoods—it has now taken on a life of its own. This recognition has been a long time coming for Wilson, and puts him in closer intellectual contact with the conservative scholars from whom he once set out to distance himself.

BUT IT also complicates the question of what can or should be done. And here, unfortunately, Wilson has not matched his policy prescriptions to the more complex social reality he has drawn.

As in his earlier books, Wilson advocates an extensive program of social and economic reforms to open up opportunities, including expanded preschool and school-to-work programs, universal health care, an increase in the Earned Income Tax Credit, and, as his centerpiece, a WPA-style public-works job program. These measures would have the additional virtue, in Wilson's eyes, of being open to all regardless of race (and therefore politically viable).

Yet is there not reason to wonder whether such programs would make much of a difference for those who exhibit the "cultural traits and behaviors" of the inner city? One lesson of the Johnson administration's War on Poverty (whose design, as Daniel Patrick Moynihan has shown, was influenced by a sociological analysis similar to Wilson's) is that one can expect only mixed results at best from efforts to alter the lives of the urban poor by expanding their economic opportunities. Those who have fallen from the mainstream are usually unable to take advantage of the second chances afforded them, while those who can, leave. The barrenness of our inner cities today can be explained not merely by the departure of industry and jobs—Wilson's point—but also, in part, by the exodus of those possessing the cultural capacity to prosper.

Wilson allows that "ghetto-related culture and behavior" will diminish only "gradually," and that for some of the unemployed, the temptations of alcohol or drugs will defeat even the staunchest efforts to turn them into productive workers. But he remains insistent that most ghetto residents believe in the virtues of individual initiative and self-support, "are ready, willing, able, and anxious to hold a steady job," and hence that "increasing the employment base would have an enormous positive impact on the social organization of ghetto neighborhoods." A primary obstacle blocking the way, he writes, is "the selective recruitment practiced by many city employers [which] results in the systematic exclusion of numerous inner-city blacks from jobs."

Nowhere, however, does Wilson provide persuasive backing for this claim. To the contrary, by his own evidence it is not race as such that employers take into account when they turn away inner-city blacks, but such job-related traits as dependability, punctuality, cooperativeness, and the like. Indeed, black employers surveyed by Wilson were slightly more likely to hold negative views of black applicants from the inner city than of white ones. Even when employment is available, in other words, "cultural traits and behaviors" seem to stand in the way of obtaining and holding a job.

ON WELFARE and its effects, Wilson again offers some penetrating observations, but again shrinks from conclusions that would seem to follow from them. There is, he acknowledges, only mixed evidence (at best) in support of his older view that the high proportion of single-parent families among blacks was the result of a shortage of marriageable black men. In fact, in passages that could have been written by the harshest critics of the welfare system on the Right, he powerfully documents how the norms of inner-city black neighborhoods encourage the use of welfare as an alternative to marriage or work. Yet he then goes on to denounce, as an "assault on welfare mothers," proposals to require welfare recipients to work. (The ammunition that Wilson here offers to opponents of the recently passed welfare-reform legislation mandating workfare is what has earned his book the loudest applause.)

Unquestionably, workfare programs have their deficiencies. But they also send an unambiguous message that welfare is not an entitlement, and that one does not receive a benefit without giving something in return. In this respect, workfare is as much about moral rights and wrongs as about economic ones, and it is a pity that Wilson does not or will not say so.

Finally, even as Wilson acknowledges that the problem of the inner city has a moral-behavioral component, he is strangely silent on the question of how to deal with it. To

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judge from what is and is not included in this book, one might think the church, with its restraining, acculturating influence, has altogether disappeared from Chicago's inner-city neighborhoods. So, too, apparently, have the police: nowhere is mention made of the possibility that more effective law enforcement could usefully reinforce conventional values (or at least remove those who flout them). While Wilson favors allowing parents to choose the public schools their children will attend, he ignores the potential of private schools, including Catholic ones. The effectiveness of such schools in changing the cultural habits of the urban poor has been demonstrated by Wilson's late colleague at the University of Chicago, James Coleman, among others.

At one point in this book, Wilson contrasts black attitudes and the behavior which accompanies them with the very different norms that prevail among impoverished Mexicans whom he has also observed in the *barrios* of Chicago. Despite a social standing similar to their black neighbors, Mexicans have managed to preserve more traditional attitudes toward marriage and the family and are more likely to be working. This suggests that curing the inner-city culture of its ills is the *sine qua non* for economic and social mobility, and not the other way around.

Yet knowing this is far easier than doing it—or even figuring out how it might be done, especially considering the range of crucial factors which lie outside the control of public policy. Given the remarkable trajectory of Wilson's intellectual career so far, perhaps we can look to his next book for some developing wisdom on that score.

Golden Oldies

Selected Poems of
Shmuel HaNagid
translated by Peter Cole
Princeton. 233 pp. $39.95

Reviewed by
Raymond P. Scheindlin

As the Jewish confidant, adviser, and henchman of the Muslim prince who headed a small but powerful state in 11th-century Spain, Ismail ibn Naghrella, known in Hebrew as Shmuel HaNagid, might well be thought of as a medieval Henry Kissinger, except that he outdid Kissinger in versatility. Not only was he for many years a central figure in the politics and administration of the wealthy, aggressive city-state of Granada, fully active in dangerous and complex court politics and military affairs, but he was also a rabbi, scholar, and poet, as well as the head of Granada's large and affluent Jewish community.

Well-schooled in the Arabic literary accomplishments essential for anyone in public life during the age of Muslim ascendancy, HaNagid was a warrior on behalf both of the rabbinic tradition and of Hebrew literary culture. In that capacity, he wrote commentaries on the Bible in Arabic; a book, also in Arabic, on Hebrew grammar; and two works on talmudic law written in the mixture of Hebrew and Aramaic still in use among the rabbis of the age. Somehow he also found time to compose three volumes of verse in biblical Hebrew, verse of such quantity and quality as to give him a claim to poetic greatness.

Today, the Jewish aristocrats of

Raymond P. Scheindlin *is professor of medieval Hebrew literature at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America.*

A provocative critique of the "cult of the Holocaust"

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medieval Spain like Shmuel HaNagid have all but vanished from Jewish consciousness. Yet only 100 years ago, West European Jews thrilled to the memory of this Golden Age. In the post-emancipation era of the late 19th century, the example of HaNagid, Judah Halevi, Maimonides, and many less famous figures spoke powerfully to Jews who were themselves striving for integration into non-Jewish society without abandoning the Jewish community. The model was one of men thoroughly acculturated into the dominant society, comfortable with its language and style of life, contributing their share to its advancement, and at the same time loyal to the Jewish tradition and so creative within that tradition as to be able to vie with the dominant culture itself.

The vanishing of the Golden Age from the consciousness of contemporary Jewry has several causes. Its most distinctive achievement, a body of poetry that surpasses in quality anything being written in European languages of the time, has no power to impress an age like our own in which poetry has lost its status. The Hebrew language, which in today's Israel is experiencing a second golden age even grander than the first, has all but vanished from America. Elite cultures, like the one that shaped HaNagid's ambitions and provided him with literary models, are out of favor in the current intellectual climate. And premodern Jewish societies have little attraction for American Jews, who, though vaguely proud of Judaism's sheer antiquity, tend to lack a developed historical perspective. Indeed, if American Jews identify with any earlier society at all, it is with that of their immediate ancestors, the *shtetl* Jews of Eastern Europe, rather than with the culturally more advanced Jewish societies of Hellenistic Alexandria, medieval Spain, or Renaissance Italy.

AND SO one suspects that the appearance of *Selected Poems of Shmuel HaNagid*, translated by the poet Peter Cole, may well be an event of greater interest to the relatively small circle of readers of serious poetry than to the American Jewish community at large. But that is too bad, for quite apart from everything else HaNagid represents, he was an interesting character, one who deserves to be better known as a personality even by a generation not impressed by poetry.

The personality in question shines through nearly every line he wrote. Here, for instance, is the young rabbi, fleeing political unrest in his native Cordoba, reflecting on his secular ambitions (I use Cole's translations throughout):

> Should someone unguilty
> hold back from
> longing toward heights like the moon?
> Should he wait,
> weaving its light across him
> like a man stretching taut his tent skin?

In plain prose, these lines are even stronger than in the translation:

> Can a man know restraint when his soul is pure and strives to rise like the moon? Can he know rest until he ties the moon's hem to his waist, as one ties on cloth for a garment?

HaNagid's poetry is a vehicle of ambition, the ambition of a man who sought to wrap himself, as here, in the light of the moon, even as God is dressed, according to Hebrew poetic tradition, in ten garments made of primordial light. Late in his career, leading a Muslim army through the same pass he was crossing when he wrote the lines just cited, he expressed his satisfaction at the outcome of those youthful ambitions:

> Pass of sand,
> have you heard how I passed alone and afraid
> as I fled through you with my stave?
> Now I cross you with hordes
> who listen to me as a father,
> and wait for my word as for rain,
> and look to my thought as a vision;
> and because the Lord my God has blessed them wherever I've turned,
> they're willingly drawn in my cord.

This last image ably expresses HaNagid's joy in his mastery of men, a theme new to Jewish writing in his time and expressed more vigorously by him than by any of his peers. It is developed extensively in his military poetry—poems couched as prayers of thanksgiving to God for granting him and his troops victory, but written at least partly to celebrate and publicize himself and his career. These poems are remarkable for weaving together two disparate sets of ideals and literary traditions: the Arabic theme of *muruwwa*, the manly virtues of valor, endurance, generosity, and friendship inherited from pre-Islamic Bedouin poetry; and the Jewish theme of the covenant between Israel and God.

The crossing of these two themes yielded the series of war poems that form the core of *Ben Tehilim* ("After Psalms," in Cole's translation), the greatest of HaNagid's three collections. Each of the war poems begins and ends by praising God for standing by in the hour of danger, and at the heart of most is a description of a battle at which the poet was present. The descriptions are full of martial enthusiasm:

> Lion-like warriors were with us,
> and soldiers like locusts in swarms:
> men weighed down, though not with flesh,
> not from the fat on their loins.
>
> All in their wrath who'd bear armor,

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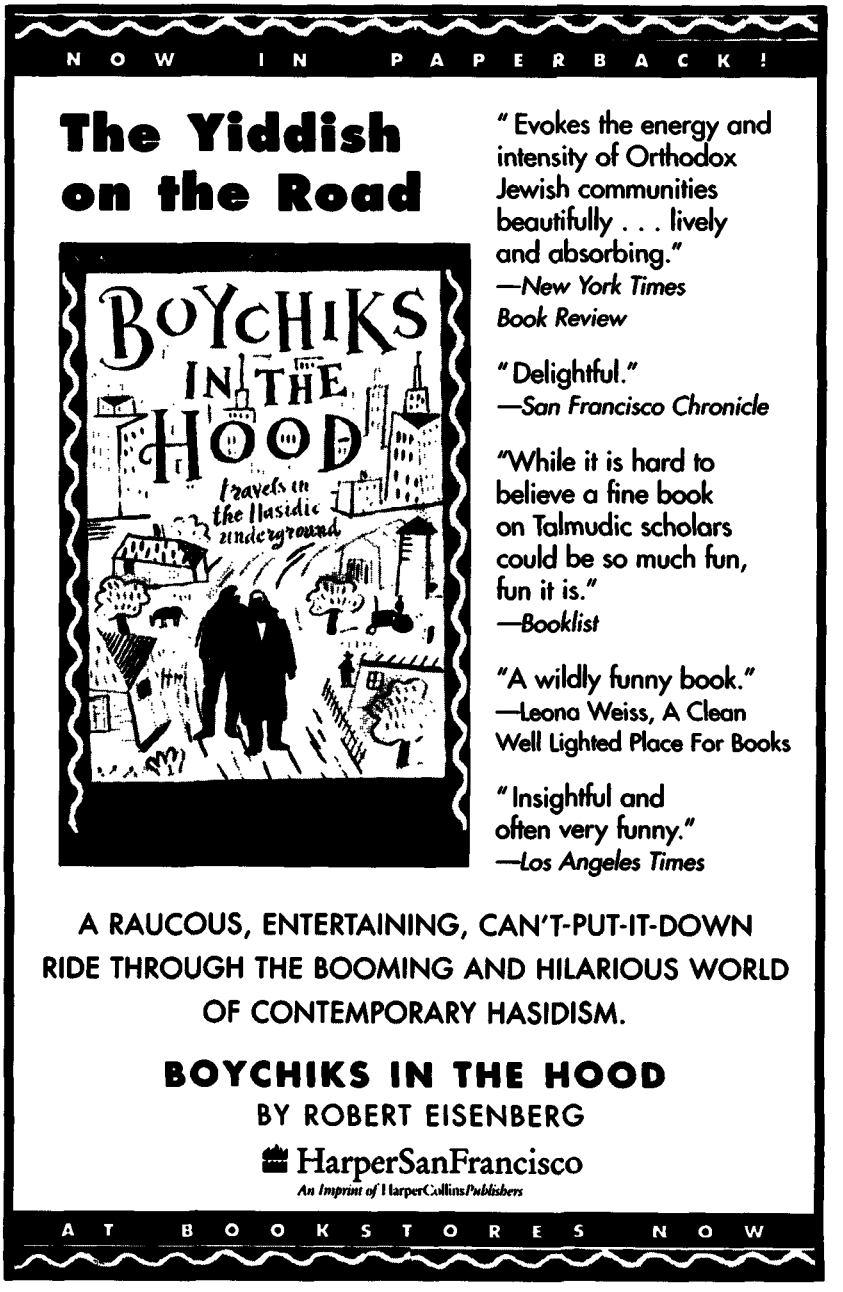
all who'd strip their robes in
war,
and all who'd hasten toward the
sword,
all who'd run toward death
with joy;
with coats of metal mesh like
waves
and shields reddened as
parchment,
on horses like clouds rushing and
flying,
with rounded helmets and
greaves;

their hands not full of lances and
spears,
like tamarisk trees—
the flashing of swords alone
could be seen—
no more was heard than their
shouts of joy!

HaNagid's accounts of battle can be as sanguinary as any in the *Iliad* of the Greeks or the *Hamasa* of the Arabs, but the poet insists that his ultimate purpose in waging the wars of Granada is neither glory nor the thrill of combat but rather the defense of God's people, and that in marching to battle he has always been faithful to God's demands. Even in the field, he claims, he and his troops observe the Sabbath and the festivals in their due season. He imagines his war poems as liturgies, extensions of the Book of Psalms itself, and like the Psalms, a permanent book of worship for the use of the Jewish people:

Recite, my people, this psalm
beside me,
and set it above all songs of
praise;
establish its words as is right and
in order,
in the mouths of the elders
and young!
And when in the future your
children ask:
"What *is* this?"—the asked
should say:
This is a psalm of praise
to the Lord who redeemed
His friend,
who composed it for the
redeemed. . . .

HaNagid was thus a man of piety, but his piety was that of the man of action, not that of the philosopher, the mystic, or the saint. Though he was not without serious introspective moments, they, too, seem to be focused on the ultimate outcome of action. Such are his reflections, in a poem reminiscent of Shelley's "Ozymandias," on the ruins of a great city, in which he compares the might of his bivouacked army with the might of the city's dead, generation buried on top of generation. And such is the tirade he imagines himself delivering to the unseeing crowd thronging a marketplace, reminding them that, like the cattle and fish being slaughtered, dismembered, and sold for food, they, too, are doomed to die. Even in his moralizing moments, the man him-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self was present, speaking in the voice of one engaged in events.

If the personal is one of the features of HaNagid's poetry that make it so appealing, his was not an isolated case. The Golden Age was golden in part because of a whole blooming of poetic personalities: proper men of the age, reticent about their family lives and subject at all times to literary conventions, but also capable of disclosing important aspects of their selves and imaginations, of exploring their attitudes toward religion, career, and society, of exposing their sources of pride and confusion as well as their complex attitudes toward the hybrid of Judaism and the Arab-Islamic culture of their environment. Long before the Renaissance supposedly discovered or invented the individual, Hebrew poets had thoroughly explored the territory. Indeed, next to the poems of HaNagid, the *cansos* of his contemporaries, the troubadours of Provence, seem hardly distinguishable one from the next.

PETER COLE's book is a worthy achievement. It provides a generous selection from all three parts of HaNagid's work, and it does so in translations that are reasonably accurate (though a querulous specialist can always find fault) and couched in a plain English suitable to the clarity, if not to the elegance, to which Golden Age Hebrew poetics aspired. The long, uniform lines of the Hebrew originals are sensibly reduced here to bite-size clauses more in tune with the conventions of English, and are often collected into stanza-like groupings that are an aid to understanding. On the minus side, this heavy reliance on spacing and lineation as a poetic device sometimes results in phrasing that works against the meaning and contradicts the Golden Age's abhorrence of enjambment.

All such considerations aside, however, this is the first book-length collection of any medieval Hebrew poet's work in verse translation by another poet*—and it thus represents the admission of the Hebrew Golden Age into the world of general literature. And high time, too. We can now look forward to more books of this type, for other poets are awaiting their turn. Even if the Jewish community at large has lost interest in the Golden Age, there may be reason to hope that poet-translators will be its redeemers.

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Title of Publication: Commentary. Publication No.: 0010-2601. Filing Date: October 1, 1996. Issue Frequency: Monthly. No. of Issues Published Annually: 12. Annual Subscription Price: $39.00. Complete Mailing Address of Known Office of Publication: 165 East 56th Street, New York, NY 10022-2709. Complete Mailing Address of the Headquarters or General Business Office of Publisher: Same. Full Names and Complete Mailing Addresses of Publisher, Editor, and Managing Editor: Publisher: Jonathan R. Cohen, 165 East 56th Street, New York, NY 10022-2709; Editor: Neal Kozodoy, 165 East 56th Street, New York, NY 10022-2709; Managing Editor: Brenda Brown, 165 East 56th Street, New York, NY 10022-2709. Owner:American Jewish Committee,165 East 56th Street, New York, NY 10022-2709 (a nonprofit membership corporation incorporated by the Legislature of the State of New York). Known Bondholders, Mortgagees, and Other Security Holders Owning or Holding 1 Percent or More of Total Amount of Bonds, Mortgages or Other Securities: None. The purpose, function, and nonprofit status of this organization and the exempt status for Federal income tax purposes has not changed during the preceding 12 months. Extent and Nature of Circulation: Total No.Copies: Average No.Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: 30,708; Actual No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: 31,465. Paid and/or Requested Circulation: Sales Through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors, and Counter Sales: Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: 2,300; Actual No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: 5,660. Paid or Requested Mail Subscriptions: Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: 23,242; Actual No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: 24,315. Total Paid and/or Requested Circulation: Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: 25,542; Actual No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: 29,975. Free Distribution by Mail: Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: 190; Actual No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: 220. Free Distribution Outside the Mail: Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: 540; Actual No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: 540. Total Free Distribution: Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: 730; Actual No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: 760. Total Distribution: Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: 26,972; Actual No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: 30,960. Copies Not Distributed: Office Use, Leftovers, Spoiled: Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: 1135; Actual No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: 500. Return from News Agents: Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: 3,301; Actual No. Copies of Single Issue Published nearest to Filing Date: 230. TOTAL: Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: 30,708; Actual No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: 31,465. Percent Paid and/or Requested Circulation: Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months: 83%; Actual No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date: 95%. I certify that all information furnished on this form is true and complete.

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* In the case of HaNagid, an earlier book, *A Jewish Prince in Moslem Spain* by Leon Weinberger (1973), contains only prose translations. A number of HaNagid's short poems were translated as prose by T. Carmi in *The Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse* (1981), and as verse by me in *Wine, Women, and Death* (1986) and by Hillel Halkin in his fine biographical essay in COMMENTARY, "The First Post-Ancient Jew" (September 1993).

Reprobate

Dossier:
The Secret History of
Armand Hammer
by Edward Jay Epstein
Random House. 418 pp. $30.00

Reviewed by
Daniel J. Silver

DURING THE 1970's and 80's there were frequent reports in the press on the activities of an American businessman with the improbable name of Armand Hammer. The chairman of Occidental Petroleum, Hammer, by then a man in his seventies, was apparently a billionaire, a high-stakes gambler in the international oil markets, a great patron of the arts, and a philanthropist. Most intriguing of all was his much-talked-of role as a capitalist "ambassador" to the Soviet Union.

As Hammer told the tale, he had long ago been among the first in the West to see business opportunities in the USSR, and as far back as the 1920's had proceeded to make a killing there at the personal invitation of Lenin himself. Doing business with Communists, he would say, was business all the same—and might just help promote world

DANIEL J. SILVER *writes about culture and politics for a variety of publications.*

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peace. Indeed, throughout the decades Hammer urged successive American administrations to experiment with trade as a new "opening" to the Soviet Union.

This message fell on especially receptive ears during the early days of détente in the 1970's. And even after that experiment was brought to a thudding halt by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979, Hammer deftly weathered the ensuing chill in Washington, keeping his initiatives alive without overtly antagonizing anyone. Finally, with the arrival of Gorbachev and glasnost, he once again found a ready audience for his appeals to "dialogue" and cooperation.

All this time, however, there were suspicions as to Hammer's true motives. While some considered him simply an opportunist acting on a particularly grand scale, others held out the ominous possibility that he was a Soviet "agent of influence," used by the KGB to wear down American resolve in the face of Soviet aggression. Edward Jay Epstein concludes in *Dossier: The Secret History of Armand Hammer* that he was more of an agent than an opportunist.

Epstein, a journalist and sometime political scientist noted for works on law enforcement, intelligence, and deception, bases this conclusion on interviews with many of the principals involved in Hammer's various business dealings, as well as on newly available Soviet archival material and, most remarkably, on tape recordings secretly made by Hammer himself of many of his "sensitive" transactions, including numerous acts of bribery. The life that emerges from Epstein's research is one built entirely on deceit.

HAMMER'S FATHER, Julius, a Russian-Jewish immigrant to the U.S., was a true believer in revolution who named his son, born in 1898, for the arm-and-hammer symbol in the banner of the Socialist party, a precursor of the American Communist party. Julius became a doctor and successful pharmaceutical entrepreneur, living well but using every spare dollar to bankroll party activities. On orders of Lenin, he was instructed to facilitate the Bolshevik presence in the United States, and eventually helped found what was later to become the Communist Party USA.

Armand himself was inducted into the Socialist party at age fifteen, but did not begin to play an active role in Communist political affairs until 1921, when his father was convicted of manslaughter for performing a botched, illegal abortion. (Epstein reveals that it was actually Armand, then an inexperienced medical student at Columbia, who killed the patient; Julius took the rap to save his son's career.) From then on, Armand stood in for his father in the service of the revolution. It was in this capacity that he went to see Lenin, who granted him a business concession so that he could blaze a trail other capitalists might follow.

But it turns out from Epstein's narrative that Hammer made little money from his early Soviet ventures, and in fact had not been invited there to do business in the usual sense at all; rather, his seemingly legitimate ventures were to act as a cover for cash transfers from Soviet intelligence services to their Western agents. Hammer's career as a budding capitalist, then, seems to have taken second place to his role as bagman for Communist spies. He arranged to trade Soviet "bills of exchange"—ostensibly drawn to purchase needed com-

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modities—for hard currency from Western banks; these funds, in turn, financed Soviet activities in Europe and, especially, the U.S. To hide the money trail, Hammer reorganized the family pharmaceutical business into an import-export shell.

OVER THE next decades, Hammer's expertise in money-laundering and other financial games proved the source of whatever wealth he accumulated—that, and his marriage, on the third try, to a wealthy widow. In 1956, using, or rather embezzling, her money, he bought a tiny, near-bankrupt California oil company named Occidental Petroleum. He then arranged for Occidental to buy a particularly lucrative Libyan oil concession (through an extensive scheme of kickbacks to Libyan officials), and it was proceeds from this deal that swelled puny Occidental into a major player capable of throwing its weight around with giants of the trade.

The Libyan operation also yielded a slush fund by means of which Hammer would buy political influence for years to come. Indeed, as only his closest associates understood, Hammer's real obsession was not money but power: he would break any law and peddle whatever influence necessary to curry favor with the truly powerful. In furtherance of this objective, he bought his way—in part with laundered funds—into an exclusive group of major contributors to the presidential campaign of Richard Nixon, an act which in the fullness of time led to the only criminal conviction of his career.

Hammer's long-nourished dream of a large business venture in the Soviet Union was finally realized when he arranged to sell vast amounts of American phosphate to a Soviet fertilizer plant he had built. But, like so much else, this too proved a money-losing bust, which gave Occidental nothing but headaches. No wonder, then, that, after his death in 1990, relieved Occidental officials immediately expunged his name from the records of the corporation, wiping his investments off the books and removing his huge portrait from a wall at company headquarters. At his death, Armand Hammer's legatees were shocked to discover that the personal estate of this supposed billionaire was valued at no more than $40 million.

IN *Dossier*, Epstein tells a highly satisfying tale of international intrigue and obfuscation, and he tells it in an appropriately dry, deadpan tone. But he also leaves some frustratingly loose ends. We never really learn, for example, much about the nature of Hammer's commitment to Communism. It is also unclear precisely how long he was an active Soviet agent, and indeed why he kept pushing, decade after decade, to further Soviet interests. Was he directly under orders from Moscow when he made his overtures to various American Presidents? Or was he a freelancer acting on his own, shrewdly anticipating initiatives that the Soviet leadership would like to see pursued?

Whatever the precise truth, it is clear that Hammer was never the truly major actor on the world stage he so desperately wanted to be. Still, for a man whose pockets were lined by the Kremlin, he did for a time succeed remarkably well in gaining the ear of many high-ranking American officials in his campaign to advance "peace," disarmament (that is, American disarmament), and détente. That he lied, stole, cheated, and spied along the way, and that so many who should have known better pretended otherwise, tells us something significant about politics in our time.

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Roots

A Lifetime Burning in Every Moment

by Alfred Kazin

HarperCollins. 341 pages. $26.00

Reviewed by
David Brooks

"In Stockholm to lecture. . . . France: Fulbright professor in American literature. . . . Now teaching at Notre Dame. . . . I wanted to remain at Smith after my wonderful visiting year as Neilson Professor. . . ." Such is the life, now possible for a distinguished scholar of American literature, that is recorded by Alfred Kazin in his journals. Now in his early eighties, Kazin has written acclaimed works of criticism as well as several volumes of autobiographical memoirs, and has edited anthologies of William Blake, Theodore Dreiser, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Nathaniel Hawthorne. But the interesting thing about *A Lifetime Burning in Every Moment* (the phrase is from T.S. Eliot) is that, notwithstanding the whirligig of fellowships, lectures, and honors, the entries in it keep returning more and more frequently, and more and more obsessively, to the same place: Kazin's homely Brooklyn roots and his own Jewishness. You can wander to the ends of the earth and God will still pull you back with the pluck of a string, say the Catholics; something similar seems eventually to pull ambitious Jewish boys back to Brownsville.

As a young man, surely, Kazin would never have expected his journey to be so circular. He describes here a poor and unhappy home, a father silent, aloof, and self-absorbed, a mother grim with work. The formative political experience of his life was coming of age, and becoming a radical, in the 30's. And then in 1938 the critic Carl Van Doren suggested that the twenty-three-year-old Kazin write a book on the "new" American literature. For years he sat in the New York Public Library, poring over Henry James, Dreiser, Emily Dickinson, H.L. Mencken, Irving Babbitt, Paul Elmer More—hardly the reading list of someone obsessed with Jewishness—and in 1942 produced *On Native Grounds*, a book which established him overnight as a leading literary critic.

In the 1930's and 40's, Kazin seems to have known everybody—at least slightly. Working as an editor at the *New Republic*, he was able to introduce himself to former editors like Edmund Wilson and Van Wyck Brooks. In his journals he describes gatherings at which he met and observed Simone de Beauvoir, Sidney Hook, Dwight Macdonald, Henri Cartier-Bresson, the British economist and Labor leader Harold Laski ("Profuse compliments on *On Native Grounds*, but nerve-racked me by name-dropping"), the art connoisseur Bernard Berenson ("in the flesh he seems to me as great a character as Gilbert Osmond in James's *Portrait of a Lady*"), the playwright Clifford Odets ("In his emotion he let [his] glasses fall on the flagstones, where one lens cracked. When I wondered what he would do now, he looked at me half in surprise and said with a touch of pride, 'Not to worry! I have four duplicates upstairs'").

As these extracts may suggest, however, Kazin's anecdotes about mid-century notables are in fact rather empty. He may have been in the same room with them, but the names *he* drops do not, on the evidence offered here, seem to have welcomed him as an intimate, or allowed much in the way of sustained or revealing contact.

David Brooks *is a senior editor at the* Weekly Standard.

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More evocative, at least in the entries from his early and middle years, is Kazin's portrait of his own life as one lived, passionately, for culture—meaning high culture—and of a global community of intellectuals, now gone, who felt that they were in some meaningful sense at the center of the only action that counted. Nowhere does Kazin mention radio or TV, and he hardly even notes the existence of newspapers or popular magazines (though he himself worked for a while at *Time*). Instead he is forever being transported by novels and classical music, and the people who matter to him and who give him a charge (sexual as well as mental) are those who write for the little magazines.

Personifying this world was the political philosopher Hannah Arendt. "What luck," Kazin writes in his journal after the war,

> Hannah Arendt placed next to me at a dinner for Rabbi Leo Baeck, and I have sought her out several times since. Darkly handsome, bountifully interested in everything, this forty-year-old German refugee with a strong accent and such intelligence—thinking positively cascades out of her in waves—that I was enthralled, by no means unerotically.

And again, a little later:

> I love this woman intensely—she is such a surprise, such a gift. I am a sucker for this kind of advanced European mind, so much better stocked and subtle than the exhausted radicalism of almost every Jewish intellectual I know. She has brought into my life so many unexpected traits and pleasures, like her intense love of poetry as a higher form of thinking. She gives me Hoelderlin, I give her Blake.

Then, jealousy intrudes. At a dinner party, Kazin finds Arendt focusing her attention on "the Russian French historian of science and philosophy" Alexandre Koyré. "Returned to my room lonely and scared," he writes, "I just wanted to weep." The whole episode captures beautifully the way high-mindedness went along in this circle with low feuds, Freudian longings, and extramarital affairs, and helps explain why the pages of *A Lifetime Burning in Every Moment* are as likely to be devoted to sex romps with some intellectual wannabe as to explicating literary parallels in Henry James. If power is an aphrodisiac, so, apparently, was a working knowledge of Blake and Ignazio Silone.

As KAZIN ages, however, the journal entries are filled less and less with sexual and intellectual networking, or with the kind of inadvertently hilarious distractions which sometimes make it seem as if a good deal of 20th-century history passed with Kazin otherwise engaged ("Reminds me of the time we were making love on the couch while the radio was on and it announced the death of Stalin"). Their place is taken instead by solitary reflections on Jewishness: being Jewish, who is Jewish and who is not, the plight of Jewishness. "The Jews, the Jews, the Jews—the repetition of it in my own mind sometimes drives me mad." To Kazin, this quality, Jewishness, has hardly anything to do with religion. For him the central Jewish fact is the Holocaust—a subject on which he has much to say, virtually none of it original or even especially thoughtful—and Jewishness itself seems mainly to function as a bridge back to his own subconscious, his own family, his own "tribe."

Though he was a radical in the 30's, even politics for Kazin is repeatedly reduced to the tribal, and almost always discussed with reference to some statement or other made by a fellow Jew. In particular, his vituperative remarks about neoconservatives center not on their ideas or on issues of policy, neither of which appears to interest him, but rather on his conviction that neoconservatives are Jews who have gone over to work for the Gentile establishment.

The deeper one reads in this book, the more salient becomes the tribal, the familial, motif. Kazin told the tale of his parents exhaustively in his 1978 autobiography, *New York Jew*; in the 1990's, he has retold it to his journals:

> The young fellow from Minsk is an orphan, will never get over the day his father Abraham died in New York in his twenties, leaving his mother to bear a posthumous son and to flee with the two boys back to Minsk. Where she marries again, puts my father in an orphan asylum. He will learn to fend for himself, will prove adventurous enough in America to go West as a painter on the Union Pacific Railroad before turning east to find a Jewish girl to marry. He will always seem to me the lonesomist man in the world, more like a son than a father. I learned to love him, my kid sister never could.

It is, of course, common enough for the elderly to dwell on their own childhoods, their parents, even their grandparents, and Kazin is hardly alone in his nostalgia: Jewish New York is now the subject of volume after volume, documentary after documentary, and an affluent version of itself is sentimentally reenacted in synagogues and community centers across the country. But what is striking is how much more deeply engaged Kazin is by the world of Jewish Brooklyn and Jewish New York from which he fled than by the world of Hannah Arendt to which he aspired. In these pages, the ultraserious world of postwar literary criticism and public philosophy now seems dusty, distant, and unlamented—including by Kazin himself.

Occasionally, it is true, he will look up and observe that the sort of discourse he and his cohort practiced has been replaced by postmodernism, deconstruction, and

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the rest. Occasionally, too, he will rail against "the little commissars now in the English department instructing us to look down on so many classics." But by and large the New Left types in today's academy seem to have replaced Kazin and company without so much as a shot being fired in return.

Of the two great milieus of Kazin's life that came under assault in this century, one, "Jewishness," by far the more mortally attacked, not only survived but underwent a miraculous revival, though Kazin himself evinces no special curiosity about either of its two main contemporary forms—Jewish religion and Jewish national existence in the state of Israel. As for the world of literary humanism, the beating *it* took seems to have left it for dead; should it ever experience a revival, that too will occur without the help of Alfred Kazin. Which raises a question: for the sake of exactly what, then, has his been a lifetime burning in every moment?

Antiprogressivism

Max Weber: Politics and the Spirit of Tragedy

by John Patrick Diggins

Basic Books. 334 pp. $28.00

Reviewed by
Wilfred M. McClay

John Patrick Diggins is a congenital dissenter. In his youth in San Francisco during the 1950's, he was scolded by a juvenile-court judge for drinking and playing pool, and for a "lack of respect for authority." As an adult, he recalls in the preface to his 1992 book, *The Rise and Fall of the American Left*, he was labeled a "troublemaker" for showing up uninvited at a conference of radical historians.

Not unexpectedly, it is the adult Diggins who has been on display in recent decades, and the objects of his rebellion are no longer the censorious attitudes of the 50's but the "progressive" blindnesses of our own self-absorbed age. The Diggins who teaches American history at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, and is the author of books on pragmatism, American political thought since the Founding, and American society in the 1940's and 50's, is an old-fashioned liberal ironist, convinced that it is humanity's inescapable calling to struggle valiantly for the achievement of goods that can never be achieved—or which, if achieved, tend to turn sour or even into their polar opposites.

Diggins's intellectual heroes include the likes of Reinhold Niebuhr, Herman Melville, Abraham Lincoln, the authors of *The Federalist*, and the New England Puritans—figures who faced up to the unresolvable tensions in the human condition, and the inherent limitations of human nature. His list tends not to include Progressives, pragmatists, and other *illuminati* from Thomas Jefferson to Woodrow Wilson to John Dewey, with their boundless and (to Diggins) pernicious faith in the triumph of reason and the perfectibility of man.

Nor does Diggins's maverick streak end there. While much of the scholarly world has happily embraced poststructuralism, multiculturalism, and identity politics, he has rebelled against political correctness and vigorously defended

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traditional methods and subjects. He has also maintained an astonishing level of scholarly productivity, at the rate of a major book every two or three years over the past decade. With the present work, he bursts the bounds of the American subject matter that has been his bailiwick in the past and ventures boldly into foreign territory to tackle the life and thought of Max Weber (1864-1920), one of the indisputable "fathers" of modern sociology and a preeminent figure in the intellectual life of the 19th and 20th centuries.

Weber's interests as a sociologist were incredibly varied, ranging from rural agricultural labor to the social psychology of bureaucracy to Chinese religion to German politics. His justly famous lectures, "Science as a Vocation" and "Politics as a Vocation," remain as fresh today as when they were delivered at Heidelberg late in his career. But Diggins believes that Weber is relatively underappreciated by Americans, who have generally gotten their Weber second-hand and shown very little interest in the man himself.

This claim is overstated—certainly there is no lack of homage paid to Weberian ideas in today's academic world, and there is evidence at every turn of his enduring influence. It is with his name that we associate our awareness of the power and importance of religious ideas as agents of social formation and historical change; of the ambivalent effects of instrumental rationality, which leads to "the disenchantment of the world" in all its hollowness and fruitlessness; of the alternation between the dangers of "charisma" and the dehumanizing drudgery of "routine" in social and political life; of the irreconcilable tension between conscience and responsibility in political life; and of the ascetic commitment to truth that separates scholarship from politics.

Yet Diggins is right to assert that Americans generally do not know Weber himself, and the absence of biographical context does render his writings strangely detached and remote, as if they were impersonal dicta that had dropped from the sky. And so it is not surprising after all that an American historian who elsewhere has stressed the significance of Calvinism in the moral and economic formation of American society should eventually have been drawn to the German author of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.

A DARK, BROODING figure, whose relentlessly probing sensibility drove him to uncover the mechanisms of power and domination that lie beneath what Edmund Burke called "the decent drapery of life," Weber, just like the Puritan saints of whom he wrote so eloquently, was a haunted man; his sober and sanguine external pose, unfailingly conveyed in photographic portraits, concealed the passions and ambitions that seethed beneath. As he emerges from Diggins's narrative, Weber was a man who craved the unvarnished and disillusioning truth with the ravenous appetite and intensity of a religious seeker—yet the truths he found never brought him any satisfaction or consolation, only deeper anxiety.

Diggins reminds us that at a pivotal moment in 1897, just after his brilliant, fast-track academic success had taken him triumphantly into a professorship at the University of Heidelberg, Weber was cut down by a profound mental collapse that lasted for nearly seven years. Like William James and John Stuart Mill before him, Weber had to endure an extended season in hell before moving on to his greatest achievements. Although the specific causes of his depression are obscure, it clearly left lasting effects, chastening and tempering his youthful outlook and tingeing it with the somber hues of tragedy.

Diggins clearly views Weber as a hero—another rebel and dissenter, a flouter of academic categories. But he does not neglect his subject's all-too-human foibles and indecisions, even down to his inability on his deathbed to choose between his wife Marianne and his lover Else Jaffé (an episode which to my Calvinistic mind Diggins treats much too sympathetically). But the main purpose of this book is not just to introduce Americans to the complexity of Weber's inner life but to promote an encounter that will widen and deepen our own national self-understanding.

THIS "AMERICANIST" spin is evident from the book's very beginning, which offers a somewhat asymmetrical comparison between the journeys to America of Max Weber in 1904 and Alexis de Tocqueville in 1831. An even more implausible juxtaposition—between Lincoln's Lyceum Address (1838) and Weber's Inaugural Address at the University of Freiburg (1895)—marks the book's conclusion. Lincoln's Address was the work of an obscure young country lawyer, not yet thirty years old, only recently arrived in the provincial capital of Springfield, Illinois, from the even more provincial New Salem. Weber's was the work of a mature and renowned scholar taking up a chair in political economy at a world-famous university. What could they have in common?

But by the time Diggins has finished, one sees that both men addressed themselves to very similar issues: the burdens of political responsibility and political education; the difficulties entailed in the perpetuation of healthy political institutions, and in cultivating the citizenship such institutions require; the tragic dimensions attendant upon the exercise of power; the importance of affect in political life; and the tendency of revolutionary charisma (respectively, the "Spirit of '76" and the "political greatness" of Bismarck) to ossify into administrative routine.

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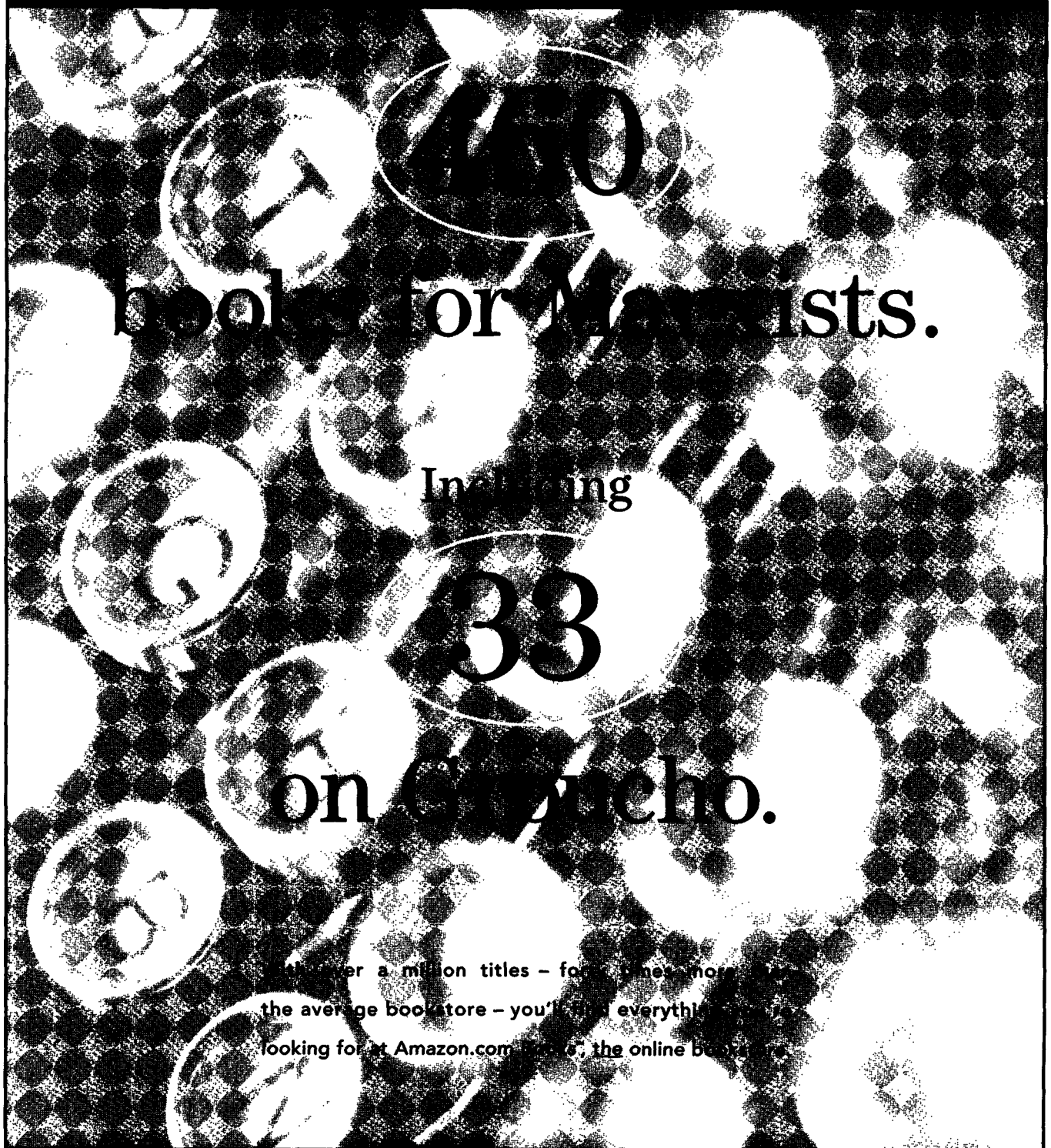

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So if it is a bit of a stretch to compare a self-educated American frontier politician with an immensely well-educated, urbane German scholar, it is a stretch worth making—and not only for Lincoln's sake. An exclusively German or European context for Weber, Diggins argues, "diminishes the profound universality of his own concerns and categories of analysis," and cuts Americans off from certain insights into themselves that they might otherwise grasp. In particular, Diggins believes that a proper appreciation of Weber can help loosen the death grip of our country's all-smothering "progressive" intellectual tradition, and help to remind us that we have another past to draw on, exemplified notably by the Calvinistic strain.

BUT THERE are also some inevitable problems arising out of this "Americanist" agenda. In order to create a common ground of comparison, Diggins has to fudge some matters and overstate others. In the first category is his too-neat treatment of Tocqueville as a Weberian opposite-number, which distorts the Frenchman's work by tasking him with a belief in "American exceptionalism" he patently did not possess (else, why would he have come to America in order to witness the European future?). A more serious error is to attribute to Tocqueville a concern only with the excesses of individualism. Diggins contrasts this with Weber's observation that atomized individuals tend to turn to an enlarged government to demand its services; but this is precisely one of Tocqueville's own cardinal contentions—i.e., that social democracy and individualism beget centralization.

Diggins also sometimes overstates his case. It simply is not true that in 1904, when Weber visited the United States, "the Protestant work ethic had all but gone to ashes"; it is not even true today. Nor was it true that American social scientists saw Protestantism as nothing more than superstition or "false consciousness." On the latter point, in fact, it is useful to contrast the highly secularized tenor of German social science in Weber's day with the evangelical, almost missionary, tone of American social scientists like Albion Small, who regarded their discipline as the continuation of liberal Protestantism by other means. By the same token, it is also wrong to make "Protestantism" synonymous with "Calvinism," for American Protestantism is simply too diverse for that. Indeed, a certain brand of Protestantism, and a very American brand at that, undergirds the very same "progressive" pieties Diggins deplores.

But these are small complaints, insignificant next to the magnitude of Diggins's achievement. For many readers, this book will probably be too dense, idiosyncratic, and difficult. But for those who make the effort, the reward will be to be drawn back to Weber himself; if it accomplishes that end, *Max Weber* will have performed a valuable service, and perhaps even provided a source of salutary troublemaking.

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